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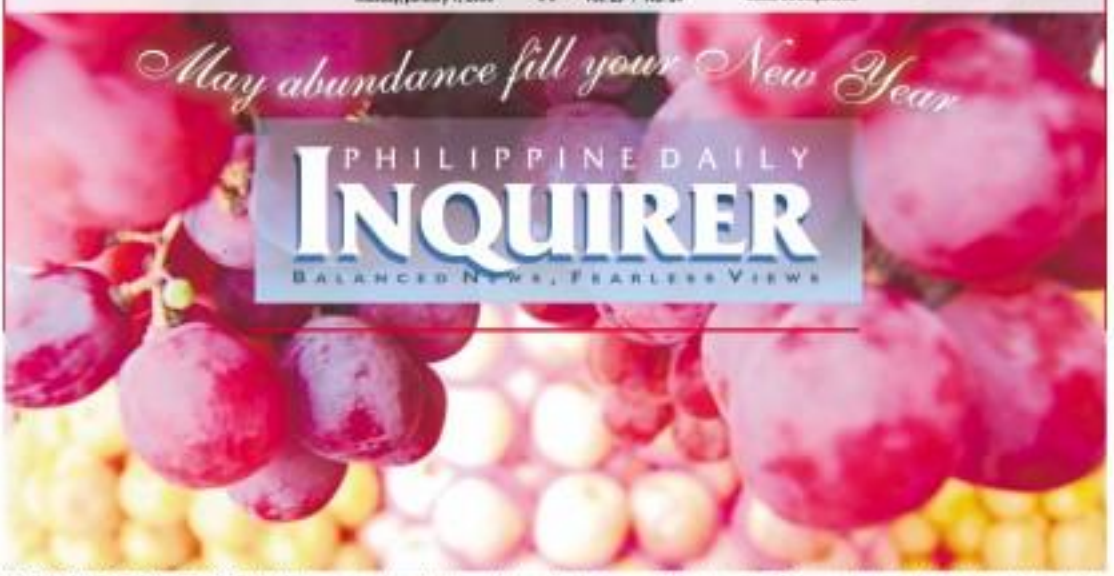

MAY THE NEW YEAR BE FRUITFUL TO ONE AND ALL. Display an array of round fruits around the house to keep the money and the luck coming is a Chinese way of greeting the New Year. But the best way is still prayer. With all your heart, in deep humility and faith, thank the Lord for all the blessings of the past year and the dawning of the New.

Rat race for Palace is on

Erap dangles No. 2 position to Manny, Mar, Ping and Loren

By Christian V. Esguerra and Jocelyn R. Uy

HOW DOES "VICE PRESIDENT" SOUND TO Senate President Manuel Villar or Senators Mar Roxas, Loren Legarda and Panfilo Lacson?

The camp of deposed President Joseph Estrada has come up with a possible line-up in the event that he finally decides to run again, this time in the 2010 presidential election.

But the scenario floated by Cagayan de Oro Rep. Rufus Rodriguez would require some of the politicians who had expressed their intention to seek the presidency to settle for the next best thing—the vice presidency.

"This is a possible compromise," Rodriguez told the Inquirer yesterday.

Under his proposal, a victory in 2010 would allow Estrada to

MAY RACE, A7

HAVE A BLAST WITHOUT THE CAST. To discourage and distract residents from playing with firecrackers and other unprimed explosive devices to blast out the old year, Marikina City laid out a fireworks show at Marikina Riverbanks a day ahead of the New Year. AFP

Bhutto son is chosen symbolic party leader

NAUDERO, PAKISTAN—Benazir Bhutto's political party named her 19-year-old son as its symbolic leader and left day-to-day control to her husband, extending Pakistan's most enduring political dynasty following the opposition leader's assassination. (See related story on Page A15.)

The major parties appeared to agree that Pakistan's general elections should take place as scheduled on Jan. 8 despite street violence and political turmoil triggered by Bhutto's slay-

BHUTTO, A15

'Super carabao' making the scene in year of the rats

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE YEAR OF THE RAT COULD also be the year of the "super carabao."

At the Philippine Carabao Center in Nueva Ecija, scientists have embarked on a research project that would help farmers

SUPER, A8

Feng shui master: Discord in RP continues

By Dustin L. Lacas

THE PHILIPPINES FACES A "challenging" year ahead, especially in the areas of politics and business, because of a conflu-ence of negative elements in Chinese astrology, according to an influential feng shui master.

In an interview, Tudor Bau, Fr. Wongsengtian said 2008—the year of the Earth Rat—would create political difficulties in the country which will continue to suffer from discord.

"There will be no harmony in politics in the Philippines," said the grand minister of the Shong Lian Temple in Quezon City, speaking in a mixture of Filipino and English.

"There will not be much change in the political scene," he said.

Wongsengtian's office is adorned with photographs of himself entertaining with some of the high-profile personalities to whom he has given feng shui advice, including President Macapagal-Arroyo, the late

FENG SHUI, A9

Battle of brass bands to be turned into top tourist attraction

By Pachalo Concepcion
Inquirer Northern Luzon

EVERY YEAR, A JOYOUS KIND of "battle" rages in Silang, Cavite.

As the town celebrates its fiesta (a three-day revelry that runs on Feb. 1), residents line the streets to watch dozens of brass bands play rousing music as a prelude to a competition that is marked by frenzy and excitement.

"People here are crazy over these bands. It's because we all grew up in a community that has a colorful history of joining brass bands," said Lito Bermido, a long-time resident whose dad is known for having formed the first brass band in Silang.

A brass band (a descendant of the early military marching bands) is a musical group that

BATTLE, A6

LATE BLOOMER. Joey Velasco did not know he could paint until he did the rare celebrated "Hapag ng Pag-ibig."

Behind 'Hapag' painting is a story of redemption

By Willy E. Arcilla
Contributor

JOEY VELASCO IS THE PAINTER of the famous *Hapag Ng Pag-ibig* (Table of Love), an interpretation of the Last Supper depicting Jesus napping with 12 poor Filipino children that has seen widespread renown, with countless reproductions in the country and abroad, including a giant billboard on Edsa.

Joey remains quite humble despite his rising popularity as a champion of the urban poor. He has received countless lives, both rich and poor, with his newfound talent in painting. But few people know that his story is as edifying and moving as his works.

During a recent talk he gave at Ateneo de Davao University, he must have invoked the "compassion of God" half a dozen times whenever he was asked about his life-changing experience and newfound artistic talent.

He traces his enthusiasm and ensuing epiphany to a near-fatal illness that afflicted him two years ago when he was diagnosed with a serious kidney disease. A mass as big as a pencil-

BEHIND, A13

Pinoy-made electric cars top draw but stuck at QC Circle

By Charles E. Bahar
Inquirer

AT THE QUEZON MEMORIAL Circle, a sprawling park at the heart of Quezon City, visitors can take a short rest drive to a closeset, giveout future. For only P10 per hop, they can either take the wheel or hitch a ride on the country's first electric car developed by a Filipino inventor.

The eight prototypes of the "G Car" built by engineer Gerry Carazo have been attracting some 100 to 200 park goers daily since the fleet was added last Nov. 30 to the Circle's eco-themed attractions.

"My dream is for every Filipino to one day enjoy wonderful stretches of virtually pollution-free roads, with my G Cars as the principal mode of personal transport," said Carazo, who produced the vehicles at an average cost of P200,000 per unit from his West Avenue workshop in QC.

One G Car variant runs on a 48-volt, deep cycle-type battery which Carazo can also supply. When plugged to a standard 220-volt power source, it would only consume between P40 and

PINOY-MADE, A6

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Sunny and Southern Luzon will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers. The rest of Luzon will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with occasional light rains. The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers or thunderstorms.

Metro Manila	Cloudy with rains	Isabela/Aurora	Partly cloudy
Baguio	Partly cloudy	Tuguegarao	Partly cloudy
Dagupan	Partly cloudy	Iba	Partly cloudy
Tagaytay	Partly cloudy	Puerto Princesa	Partly cloudy
Legazpi	Partly cloudy	Catbalogan	Partly cloudy
Virac	Partly cloudy	Cotabato	Partly cloudy
Naga	Partly cloudy	Gen. Santos	Partly cloudy
Roxas	Cloudy with rains	Zamboanga	Partly cloudy
Iloilo	Cloudy with rains	Cagayan de Oro	Partly cloudy
Calapan	Cloudy with rains	Davao	Partly cloudy

Temperature and weather forecasts for other cities around the country are available at www.pagasa.dost.gov.ph

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PAF chief cuts short term of service

Tolentino retires a month early to give others a chance at job

By Tarra Quismundo

PHILIPPINE AIR FORCE CHIEF Lt. Gen. Romulo Tolentino has decided to retire a month early to give Malacañang a wider berth in choosing his successor.

Tolentino wrote higher headquarters requesting his desire to end his term this month to October to give the two most senior Air Force generals a crack at his post.

"I decided to relinquish my post early to give a wider array of options for my successor," Tolentino told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

Tolentino, who assumed command of the PAF in February 2007, was slated to end his term on Feb. 7 when he turns 56, the mandatory retirement age in the military.

Tolentino explained that the leading candidates for his job, PAF Vice Commander Maj. Gen. Pedro Imperio and Armed Forces of the Philippines Vice Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Delfin Cuñeng, would otherwise not qualify to replace him if he were to

TOLENTINO

complete his term.

"If I finish my term on February 7, they would be disqualified because by then they'd have less than a year of service left," he said. Ranking military appointees must have at least a year left in the service to qualify for a final posting.

Both candidates will reach retirement age in January 2008. Cuñeng is on the 9th and Imperio on the 21st.

Tolentino's successor have been set for Jan. 4.

Had Tolentino decided to complete his term in February, both generals would have been disqualified as they would have had only 11 months left in the service.

PAF headquarters may submit a list of recommended successors but only President Macapagal-Arroyo may appoint the Air Force chief.

Swapping his 11-month term, Tolentino, a seasoned helicopter pilot, said much of his focus was on ensuring and securing Air Force pilots amid their migration to commercial aviation.

Tolentino's watch had its share of aircraft crashes but he said he endeavored to restock the PAF's fleet.

Plans to acquire new planes, particularly assault and transport aircraft, were drawn up during his term.

All remain on the drawing board, however, given the extensive acquisition and bidding process in the military.

Tolentino's successor will continue the PAF's modernization program, he said.

"We have to continue with the modernization program because we have to replace our aging aircraft," he said.

Tolentino said he was also pushing for the passage of a law that would allow the PAF to keep its pilots longer in the service.

Under the current law, pilots are required to retire at 56 years old.

"We have to retain our pilots because they are very expensive to train," he said.

RET Miss Arroyo, still wearing house clothes, accompanies his mother, President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is on her way to the education stakeholders' meeting in the Conference Hall of The Manors in Baguio City Monday. PHOTO BY RYAN LEAGOGO

This year, President gets a respite from holiday work

By Christine O. Avendaño

CAUSE FOR TEARS, PERHAPS: Macapagal-Arroyo has been working on this Christmas and the New Year.

The President and her family are spending the New Year in Baguio City sans members of the Cabinet, who in previous years, would join her for meetings during the holidays.

In the last days of 2007, Ms Arroyo managed to finish all her meetings before she lined off for a traditional family holiday to the City of Pines last weekend.

Aides Christmas, the Presidency had several meetings in Malacañang to assess the work of her administration in 2007 and to plan goals and objectives for the following year.

On Dec. 27 alone, she met her Cabinet officials on top of her economy and poverty mitigation activities and would have met with her security officials but cancelled the meeting due to time constraints.

The Chief of the New Year, yesterday, Ms Arroyo managed to squeeze in one official meeting and spoke with "education stakeholders" at the Mansion, the presidential residence in Baguio City.

If the President was taking it easy now, that's because her "level of comfort is very high," Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said yesterday.

"Things are going all right," Ermita said in jest that the Arroyo administration was "in high tide" about the New Year, with many of its projects implemented in 2007 and several more in the "pipeline."

For 2008, he said the focus would be on governance and the implementation of more infrastructure work — the construction and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, farm-to-market roads and irrigation systems.

Ermita said food production and education would also be the focus of the government this year.

WHAT'S INSIDE

RIGHTS BODY glad over budget increase but... /A3

YOUNG PINOYS headed for Down Under as scholars /A4

FREED COUPLE still unheard from—Gabriela /A4

Imports from MNCs exempt from X-ray scanning — Customs

By Marguax C. Ortiz

IN A MOVE DESIGNED TO IMprove trade facilitation in the country's ports, the Bureau of Customs has announced that all imports from multinational companies will be exempted from X-ray screening.

Lourdes Mangaoang, the newly designated head of the BOC X-ray inspection project, said part of her program of action for this year would be to promote a more effective use of the bureau's X-ray scanners.

"X-rays will be used to enhance revenues through proper valuation of goods, prevent the entry of anti-social goods and improve trade facilitation which is the fundamental mission of the World Customs Organization," Mangaoang said.

She mentioned Nestlé as among the multinational companies whose shipments no longer required X-ray scanning.

"Nestlé normally has 100 containers per shipment. There would be no trade facilitation if we let them pile up for scanning," she said.

She explained that shipments coming from Europe already have certificates of origin, according to the signed rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The certificates contain such important information as the quantity and value of the goods being shipped.

"They would not be allowed to make wrong declarations since they would also be accountable in their head office," she said.

However, Mangaoang said the bureau would be wary about enforcing the selectivity of cargo, that is, the agency's computer system would screen which of the shipments should be subjected to scanning.

Mangaoang said the X-ray inspection project has delivered P4 billion in the BOC revenue collections in the past six months.

The bureau is also embarking on a project that would make the scanned images of cargo available to investigating offices, including the one based in the Office of the President, according to BOC deputy commissioner Alexander Arevalo.

"We have to make available the images from the scanners to several offices for further scrutiny, preventing corruption in the ports," Arevalo said.

He explained that even with the scanning machines, a source of vulnerability would be the "eyes of the scanner himself, whether to allow the entry of illegal products or not."

The project costs some P150 million to improve the scanners and link it to the Office of the President, he said.

Holiday fuel discounts extended

By Abigail L. Ho

MOTORISTS WILL GET TO EN-joy a post-Christmas gift: up to midnight of Jan. 6 as Caltex Philippines Corp. extends by another week its offer of a P1-a-liter discount on gasoline products and a 50-centavos-a-liter price slash on diesel and kerosene.

Eastern Petroleum chair and chief executive Fernando Elizalde said the growing strength of the peso and the stable outlook for crude and refined petroleum products for the first few days of January are sufficient basis for extending the rollback.

Eastern Petroleum initiated the price discounts at 5 p.m. on Dec. 28, preceding a rollback by Petron Corp. and Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. to offer the same rate cuts "in selected competitive trading areas."

Unioil Petroleum Phil. also implemented the same price reductions.

Earlier, Roberto Ravago, Shell general manager for external affairs, said market forces would continue to dictate the prices of its products.

Pope: Family harmony is key to global peace

PEACE CULTIVATED AMONG family members is the key to bringing peace to the whole global community.

This is Pope's message and challenge to the Christian faithful as they face the new year and, coincidentally, also celebrate the 40th anniversary of the World Day of Peace today.

Pope Benedict XVI's message, as conveyed through the Papal Nuncio to the Philippines, Archbishop Edmund Joseph Adamo, emphasizes how the family is linked to global peace.

"In the family, you find all of the essential elements of peace: justice, nurturing mutual help, care for each other, forgiveness, compassion," he said the Pope.

In a letter to Fr. Jaime B. Hautea, director of the National Office of Mass Media for the Catholic Church in the Philippines, Adamo explained that here the Pope points out how people's lives in their families provide an experience of all the fundamental ingredients of peace.

The Holy Father stressed that where the society and public policy are not committed to safeguarding the family, they deprive themselves of an essential resource in having a peaceful society.

"Whoever, even unknowingly, erodes the family also undermines the peace in the entire community, national and international," said Adamo.

The Pope has called on all nations to remember that all are "members of one human family, living in a common home that God has given us."

In line with this, the Pope also calls for "demilitarization, for the dismantling of all nuclear weapons, and for the protection of the poor from oppression by the powerful."

Closer to home, Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) president and Jaro (Iloilo) Archbishop Angel N. Lagdameo has challenged the Filipino Catholic community to assess themselves—individually and as a community—as they face the year ahead.

"Everyone must examine his conscience," said Lagdameo in his New Year's message.

The senior prelate said there is a litany of questions that Filipinos must ask themselves: what have they done to feed the hungry, to build shelters for the homeless, to support the education of poor students, to give health security to the sick, to ensure those unjustly imprisoned, to liberate the oppressed, and to do away with the abductions and extra-judicial killings.

Beverly T. Slatchford

Rights body elated over increase in budget, but ...

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS is happy with Malacañang's adding P25 million to its budget next year but remains troubled by government's unsteady performance in addressing the issue of extrajudicial killings and other human rights problems in the country.

CHR Chair Purificacion Quisumbing announced recently that President Macapagal-Arroyo has given the commission an additional P25 million to address the problem of political killings.

Part of the money will help bankroll independent forensic testers that will aid in the gathering of "physical evidence" in the absence of witnesses, she said.

The CHR earlier pointed out that most of the time the commission finds it hard to elevate some of the cases of political killings to the appropriate courts because of lack of testimonial evidence. Witnesses are afraid to come out in the open, it noted.

In October, the agency stepped in public inquiry into the disappearance of the young activist Jonas Burgos, citing lack of cooperation from the parties involved.

Quisumbing said that with the P25 million, the CHR can support the training of its field investigators and push for the "re-investigation" of some of the cases filed with the commission.

"I want to acknowledge that the [money] will help. This is a manifestation that there is willingness on the part of the executive branch to address extrajudicial killings. But this is just a one-shot deal," she said.

The commission said it cannot give the government a "glowing report card" on how it performed in ensuring respect for human rights this year.

Human rights groups have blamed the Arroyo administration and the military allegedly running death squads that target left-leaning activists and media workers.

The United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston recently issued a report accusing the Armed Forces of killing leftist activists as part of a campaign against communist insurgents.

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Tell truth on NPA killings, UN exec told

By Lolita B. Saberon

A DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OFFICIAL has defended the government against criticisms over its purported failure to stem political killings, and called on the United Nations special rapporteur to disclose what he learned about atrocities committed by the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army.

Agnes Undersecretary Ricardo Blancaflor, who heads DOJ's Task Force 211 against political violence, wrote UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston about a killing the NPA had owned up to, at the same time lamenting the Philippine government had been subjected to severe criticism with regard to the extrajudicial killings occurring mainly in rebel-infested areas of the country.

'Quite ironic'

"It is quite ironic that while the government is judiciously trying to implement your recommendations, the CPP/NPA is making a mockery of the same. The entire world must know the activities of the CPP/NPA. Your office must tell the whole truth," Blancaflor said in his Oct. 19 letter to Alston.

He pointed out the NPA had admitted to killing Expedito Ribuya in Lupo City and had called it a case of "revolutionary justice." He noted that an NPA spokesperson had tagged Ribuya in the killing of Bryan Morta provincial coordinator Rodolfo Alvarado in 2006.

Ribuya was also allegedly subjected to a "deep investigation" by the NPA and had been shown to have complied with military death squads to kill Alvarado, he said.

"It is with absolute certainty Ribuya's name will be excluded from the list of victims of extrajudicial killings as the CPP/NPA deemed it as exercise of revolutionary justice," Blancaflor said.

Inconsistent

He cited Alston's own findings that the 800th serious were inconsistent with international human rights and humanitarian law, in light of the fact that police and military intelligence personnel are deemed legitimate targets, and the category is too broad and includes informers and peasants.

He noted that Alston had found the 500th people's courts "deeply flawed or simply a sham."

"As the Philippine government remains committed to finding solutions and closure on this issue, the CPP/NPA is out to dispense their brand of justice, which you correctly referred to as deeply flawed and a sham," Blancaflor said.

Committed

He said the government intended to use Alston's findings and recommendations in his report on the human rights situation in the Philippines, and added that President Macapagal-Arroyo was committed to stopping and solving the extrajudicial killings.

He said one manifestation of such a commitment was the formation of Task Force 211 to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible for political violence, and ensure the care and protection of people and communities victimized and threatened by militants.

But he also decried accusations the government tolerated or encouraged political violence.

Military groups have blamed the administration for the extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances that mostly involved their members.

"It is public knowledge that our country has been unfairly subjected to severe criticisms for its allegedly passive stance toward political violence, particularly extrajudicial killings. The Philippine government asserts the fact that there is no such policy of state-sponsored atrocities despite the wildly claimed and pernicious belief of some sectors of our society.

No one's heard from freed couple

Militant groups doubt they had been released by the military

By TJ Burgonio

WHERE COULD THEY BE?

Days after they were purportedly freed by the military, activists couple Manuel Bejasion and Juliet Fernandez have yet to contact their respective families or return home, militant groups said yesterday.

The women's group Gabriela and fisherfolk group Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas (Pamalakaya) said they had not been able to confirm if the military had indeed released the couple.

The two were reported to have been freed shortly after they were presented to the media by the military at a safe house outside Tacloban City last Wednesday.

"Relief's number said she has not called them. Their only assurance she has been released is for Juliet to call them," said Gabriela secretary general Rasol de Asua in a phone interview.

"What the agony her parents went through looking for her, the best Christmas gift is to hear her voice. But up to now, the line not connected chene," De Jesus said.

There was no confirmation either that Bejasion had been freed by the military, according to Pamalakaya spokesperson Gerry Albert Gorpiz.

"It now appears the military fooled their parents and the people. Their claim that they were released was just a political ploy," Gorpiz said.

The couple were presented to media by the Philippine Army's 62nd Infantry Battalion on Wednesday to belie reports they were killed following their arrest by soldiers on May 13 last year at a checkpoint in Pinabacdao, Samar.

The Army said they were being ordered so they could meet a new life.

Bejasion, 28, and Fernandez, 22, were suspected members of the communist New People's Army.

Gorpiz said the military should release the documents on their release and reveal to whom they were turned over.

"What we fear is that after they were presented [in media], anything can happen to them," he said in an interview.

"Some people go missing after they're presented by the military," he added.

The couple had claimed to the media they were treated well during their seven months in detention, but the human rights group Karapatan said this appeared to be part of a military script.

Both Gabriela and Pamalakaya said they would be compelled to file a petition for a writ of amparo in the courts if the couple are not released after the holiday season.

"If they're not presented, and there's no formal turnover to their families, we will file the petition for a writ of amparo for both of them," Gorpiz said.

Meanwhile, angry militant groups yesterday demanded a congressional inquiry into the alleged abuses by Samar-based soldiers of a doctor hospitalized in Jolo, Sulu, saying the incident was "enough ground" to scrutinize the country's Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States.

The protest group Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas said the hospital incident was the second time US troops directly were involved in the country's affairs. The first incident, KMP chair Rafael Mariano recalled, was disclosed by a wire photo showing US soldiers in active military roles in the last August. With a report by Jeremiah Sering

SEIZED FIRECRACKERS

Police officers inspect different types of firecrackers which were earlier seized and brought to Camp Karingal in Quezon City yesterday. Despite the ban on illegal firecrackers, enterprising vendors still sold them openly in various areas in Metro Manila. (Jilson Tano/CO)

16 talented young Pinoys head to Aussie schools as scholars

By Tarra Quismundo

A SELECT GROUP OF YOUNG Filipinos will experience university life as scholars in Australia this year, each one aspiring to learn more so they can help their countries on their return.

The 16 students from all over the country will be assigned to different universities around Australia in 2008 to take up master's and doctoral degrees as this year's recipients of the Australian Leadership Award (ALA), a two-year-old Australian Embassy scholarship program.

The ALA is offered annually to "high achievers" in some 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific region for them to pursue graduate studies in Australian universities. Some 90 Filipinos were sent to Australia earlier this year as the first batch of ALA scholars.

"We regard scholarships as an important part of our commitment to Philippine and regional education excellence," said Australian Ambassador Tony Hely during the recent ALA launch.

"That is why the Australian Scholarships initiative was launched—to promote development, economic reform and good governance in the Asia-Pacific region, while enabling current and potential future regional leaders to develop enduring linkages with Australia," he added.

The scholarship is worth around A$150,000 ($14.8 million) for those taking up master's and roughly A$250,000 ($9.2 million) for doctorate programs. It covers full tuition, allowances, overseas health coverage, return fare and visa expenses.

Selected out of 58 applicants, this year's scholars include achievers in the academe, government, the military, and research and development institutions.

Alarcon, an Iloilo native who is an undergraduate at the University of the Philippines and who later worked as an editorial and research assistant in the paper, applied for the scholarship while working as a journalism lecturer at the Kalayaan College and an online English instructor.

A human rights coordinator with the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta) animal rights group, Alarcon chose Monash as it offered a unique graduate-level masters in environmental studies program.

"Other universities offer studies only on environment, the Monash focused on sustainability, which is something we all need," said Alarcon, who plans to pursue projects to showcase energy sources and energy-conserving design and technology after she gets her Australian degree.

Boosting Alarcon's bid to earn an Monash was an outstanding rating in the International English Language Testing System, a requisite for admission to foreign universities. Alarcon got a score of 8.5 out of a perfect 9.

Speaking in behalf of the scholars, Jessiel Lagunsad, a staff member of Sen. Richard Gordon's office, thanked the Australian Embassy for their "investment" in the Filipino.

"We are very thankful that the Australian government is investing on the youth through education, training young minds from the Asia-Pacific region. We hope that this investment will create a ripple and its dividends will see many global Pinoys—competitive, successful and able to give back to their country," Lagunsad said in a speech during the launch.

Lagunsad, 25, will be studying diplomacy and international affairs at the Australian National University.

Other recipients of the ALA this year are: Imelda Panopio, 47, an assistant scientist at the International Rice Research Institute; Bernard Aquino, 32, senior quality assurance manager/environment officer at the Technological Institute of the Philippines; Dr. Montmillon Lacuna, 27, resident physician at the Davao Medical School Foundation Hospital; Harold Tacan, 30, a student specialist at the Philippine Health Insurance Corp.

Aberia Nedyn Dano, 28, a Philippines project coordinator at the Philippines-Australia Landcare Project of the World Agroforestry Center; Arnan Lacigh, 34, an instructor at Economics, International trade and finance at the Mindanao State University Jamiy Bearhal, 27, an assistant professor at the University of the Cordilleras; Ar Lt. Jesus Alia Bolder, 27, information officer in the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Roger Barraga, 33, an information technology officer at the Philippine Rice Research Institute; Analiza Teh, 41, a lawyer and assistant secretary at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Sarcilli Sioma, 36, an instructor at the Cotabato provincial capitol; Abdel Ballagh, 30, dean at the College of Computer Studies, University of Southern Philippines Foundation.

Abd. Hannan Al Fouad Abu Ali, 40, intelligence officer, Philippine Army; and Raquel Renante Ho, 35, English and humanities instructor at the Silliman University.

Better communication lines between media and police

By Kristin Pupa

IN LIGHT OF THE STRAINED relations between media and police after the Nov. 29 Manila Peninsula incident, Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Director General Avelino Razon ordered yesterday the establishment of better lines of communication between the police force and media.

Razon gave the order as newly installed PNP Public Information Office (PIO) and spokesman Senior Supt. Nestor Fajardo Jr. in simple ceremonies in Camp Crame yesterday.

Razon and Barbalzone must fully develop the PNP strategic public information (SPI

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TV ratings firm acts to protect identities of poll respondents

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

GLOBAL RATINGS FIRM AGB Nielsen Media Research has asked a Quezon City court to compel its client, giant broadcast firm ABS-CBN, to cease and desist from using anything that would unmask its survey respondents.

The motion for protective order was filed on Dec. 28 by the Nixie Manuntag Gozzo Rivera and Abrantes Law Office in behalf of AGB Nielsen to QC Regional Trial Court Branch 96.

AGB Nielsen was earlier sued by ABS-CBN for the research company's alleged failure to investigate reports of cheating in TV ratings surveys by a rival broadcast company.

The complaint by ABS-CBN was based on allegations that some ratings survey participants or home panel members of AGB Nielsen had been contaminated by the rival network which conducted a house-to-house promotional campaign involving raffle and prizes.

Unmasking

AGB Nielsen pointed out certain ABS-CBN "broadcasts" could lead to the unmasking of the ratings firm's survey households.

"In its TV programs 'Pinoy Records' and 'The Buzz' which aired on Dec. 16 and Dec. 23, respectively, plaintiff [ABS-CBN] went to the extent of inviting viewers, obviously including home panel members, to call certain numbers designated by the plaintiff. The viewing public, again obviously including home panel members, were encouraged to report to ABS-CBN any purported attempt to change their viewing behavior," AGB Nielsen said in a statement.

In its motion, AGB Nielsen said this action by ABS-CBN could lead to the discovery of the identities and sensitive details of its home panel members.

Own investigation

AGB Nielsen told the court that on Dec. 3, it informed ABS-CBN in writing that it was starting an investigation of the reported contact made by a "rival company" with some of AGB Nielsen's home panel members. It did not identify the rival company in its statement yesterday.

In the same letter, AGB Nielsen stated that the reported breach was treated with the "utmost importance" by users of its data and by marketers who spend large amounts of money advertising on commercial television, relying on AGB Nielsen data to make their investment decisions.

The ratings firm said the necessary to allegations that it did nothing about the purported breach. AGB Nielsen told ABS-CBN that it had formed "a data management group" consisting of leading advertisers and agencies and enlisted the support of key industrial organizations.

On Dec. 19, AGB Nielsen general manager Hugo Boliveau said in her affidavit filed with the QC RTC that ABS-CBN had no basis for demanding that the ratings firm refrain totally from distributing its data to all its clients.

"There is no basis for it. The data is accurate and reliable. Its accuracy has been checked and confirmed using globally accepted statistical practices and standards. There is no danger that the data would unfairly or inaccurately represent the viewing habits of our subject TV audiences," she said.

Nielsen said that the company excluded the panel homes in the Bacolod City samples that were reportedly contaminated by ABS-CBN's rival network and processed the new data.

'Coincidental survey'

It then compared the new data to the original and found that the alleged tampering had had no effect on the results.

A "coincidental survey," which is a face-to-face poll involving thousands of respondents in various cities and provinces, confirmed the accuracy of AGB Nielsen's data, Boliveau told the court.

On Dec. 21, AGB Nielsen said it would fully comply with the 20-day temporary restraining order (TRO) issued by the Quezon City court preventing the company from issuing data from corrupted home panels.

An ABS-CBN official who asked not to be identified said the network had no comment for now on AGB Nielsen's motion.

TOUGH SELL
A female vendor offers she hopes to persuade motorists to buy her wares at E. Rodriguez in Manila.

Atienza vows to save QC nature park

AFTER MANILA ZOO, DAVIDEO notes Secretary Lito Atienza now wants to save the Muny Aquino-Parks and Wildlife Center from deforestation and develop it into a biodiversity center featuring more flora and fauna.

"We'd like to develop this place so that we can have real quality display of Philippine animals and plants. So said during the DENR's Christmas party at the sprawling zoo and botanical garden in Quezon City.

Atienza agreed with observations that some of the animal cages cooked with stink, and hence, had to be rehabilitated and developed into a more pleasant park.

The 22-hectare park seems rich at least 20 species of trees and shrubs, and is home to several species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

TJ Burgonio

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Tuesday, January 1, 2008
Mary, Mother of God
1st Reading: Num 6:22-27
Psalm Responding: Gal 4:4-7
Gospel: Lk 2: 16-21

The shepherds leave hurriedly and found Mary and Joseph with the baby lying in the manger. On seeing this they related what they had been told about the child, and all were astonished at hearing the shepherds.

As for Mary, she treasured all these messages and reasonably pondered over them.

The shepherds then returned glorifying God and praise to God for all they had heard and seen, just as the angel had told them.

On the eighth day the circumcision of the baby had to be performed, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

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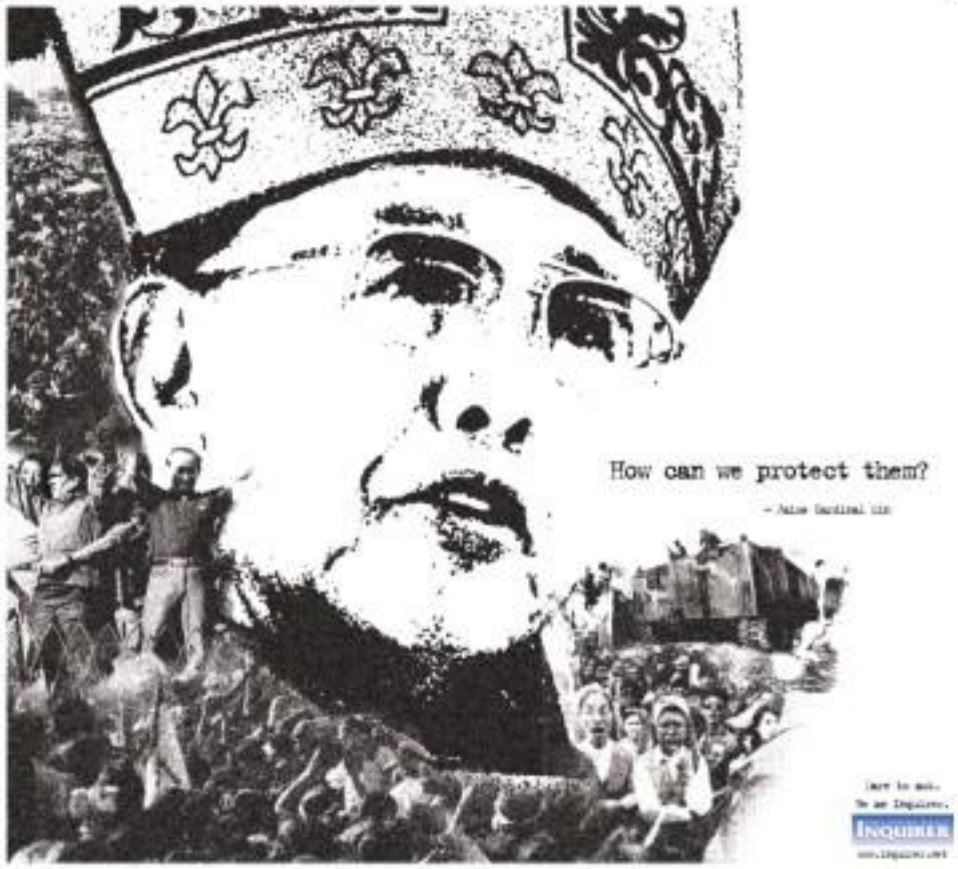
Commentary

The Blessed Virgin Mary receives the Word of God into her person in a way that is unique among the human race, for she is given the great honor of being the mother of our Lord Jesus, true God and true man. As she holds the Child Jesus in her arms, she becomes the immediate gift of the Word of God and automatically proclaims new to mystery. In so doing she is a model for all who listen attentively to the Word of God, especially through the reading of the Holy Bible.

As you keep your Bible Diary throughout 2008, may your heart be daily inspired, challenged, consoled, and uplifted. Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, may you be drawn closer to the loving presence of her Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.



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Pinoy-made electric cars top draw but stuck at QC Circle

THE G CAR IN LIMBO: For lack of funds and government support, the country's first electric car ends up like a sideshow at the Quezon Memorial Circle. For P30, the curious may drive one of eight prototypes for a spin inside the park. CHARLIE VILLAFANIA

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Opposition committing 'suicide' if it fields Erap–Macalintal

ROMULO MACALINTAL, PHILSTAR Manunggul Awards lawyer on election concerns, said the opposition would be committing "suicide" if it decided to field deposed President Joseph Estrada for the 2010 presidential election.

"Setting the entire duration of the campaign. [The opposition] will be busy answering the petition to disqualify him and convincing the people he's still qualified," Macalintal said.

He compared Estrada's situation with that of three presidential candidates Alfredo Lim whose his citizenship was double on his legitimacy and candidacy in 1998.

The election lawyer also expressed doubt that the opposition would manage to come up with a single standard bearer in 2010.

Divided votes

"The administration's will only be too happy to see Erap run in 2010 with Osmeña President Manuel] Villar, Gen. Manuel] Roxas and [Sen. Loren] Legarda dividing their votes, to the advantage of the administration candidate," Macalintal said.

He also said that it was "improper" for an official of the Commission on Elections to comment on the legality of Estrada's plans to run again for president.

He said election Commissioner Rene Sarmiento may be asked to inhibit himself from deciding on the Estrada issue should it reach the Comelec in 2015.

Macalintal and Sarmiento incidentally shared the view that Comelec officials who elected former President from running again for the same position.

Both lawyers said that Estrada may run for any other election positions except for president.

Only this succession

"With due respect, Commissioner Sarmiento should refrain from making such comments in the future if the issue is brought to the Comelec, he could be inhibited due to such premature position made publicly" he added.

Macalintal went on to say that Estrada may still become President but only through succession. He said he may run for vice president and if he wins, may succeed the elected President should the latter die, resign or be removed from office.

In Hohenzollern, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said the administration could start focusing on the 2010 presidential election in the second semester and at the latest, the last quarter of 2008.

He said though that the Lakas-CMD would be holding a meeting either on Jan. 7 or Jan. 8 to "prepare the party's strategy" for 2010. Norman Bordadora and Cherlaine R. Mercado

Rat race for Palace in 2010 is on

Transcribed

move the remaining three years of his term that was abbreviated by a military-backed popular revolt in 2001.

This would mean that by 2013, his erstwhile running-mate would take over and serve the remainder of Estrada's fresh, six-year term, according to the reorganization.

Estrada's spokesman that person would be ready still run for president," he explained. "That person would make a good president because of the latter's experience."

Estrada open to proposal

Estrada is open to the scenario painted by his spokesperson.

"Parasabi ganon nga. Di could be that way)," the former President said yesterday.

Rodriguez said such a scenario would be similar to the scenario of former President Macapagal-Arroyo who ran for a fresh term in 2004 after replacing Estrada three years earlier.

Slide down

The lawmaker, an immigration commissioner during the Estrada administration, ruffled off the names of Roxas, Villar, Lacson and Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay as possible running-mates of the former president.

Lacson, a loser in the 2004 presidential election, has also signified his intention to run again.

"Any of them could probably slide down to vice president," Rodriguez said.

He said the scenario he presented would still depend on Estrada's decision to run in 2010 or just keep his status as the figurehead of the divided opposition.

Estrada said Saturday he would run again for president if the various opposition groups failed to come up with a common standard bearer.

Sure win

He said he did not want a repeat of the 2004 election that saw President Macapagal-Arroyo winning over Fernando Poe Jr. because Lacson also ran for president, dividing the anti-Arroyo votes.

Estrada said yesterday that reviewing his post in 2010 would be a "last priority" but reiterated that if the opposition failed to unite by then, he would run to give the opposition a "last shot."

"But I don't believe in staying in power too long. I am just doing my best so that there won't be a repeat of the 2004 elections," the 71-year-old Estrada said in a phone interview.

Asked how serious he was in running for president two years from now, he said it was not easily to make his decision final.

He was still hoping that in the remaining days, he would be able to keep the opposition together and make them much smaller one (slim).

"Labo kasi nga kanya-kanyang ambisyon (Each has an ambition [to be president])," Estrada pointed out, adding that at this point, he would only observe and watch his allies from a distance.

"If he [Estrada] runs and wins again, that will be a vindication for him," Rodriguez said, citing the former President's plunder conviction.

"There is no other person who can unite the opposition and he has a genuine mass base. He's very charismatic and enjoys the sympathy of the people."

No legal obstacle

Rodriguez, former dean of the San Sebastian law school, said there was no legal obstacle to Estrada's decision to run again.

He said the Constitution barred only a sitting President from seeking reelection, not someone like Estrada who was barred out of office and would be running after a six-year break.

"The key word here is 'reelection,' which is a bar to an incumbent official," he said. "The idea is to keep a sitting official from using the resources of his office to seek another term."

But Ms. Rowena Daniel, Legal Counsel, Senator Aquino, reiterated that Estrada could not run for president again.

Aquino described as legally "questionable" any move on the part of the former President to join the 2010 presidential race.

"The Constitution says that once elected and served, you can't run again. The measure is like a certificate of candidacy somebody still question it before the (high) court," said Aquino, a prosecutor during the aborted impeachment trial of Estrada in the Senate.

In the event that Estrada decides to seek some the highest elective post, this would have no effect on the chances of the administration standard bearer, according to Aquino.

He said the Administration coalition was not threatened because "whatever he [Estrada] does, he is grateful (to his forces for pardoning him), and will not go against the administration."

Take it with grain of salt

Palawan Rep. Abraham Kahlil "Baham" Mitra said that everyone should take Estrada's presumptuous with a grain of salt.

"The former President is just exploring his newfound freedom. He has been hanging to be with the masses whom he truly loves. I would do the same," Mitra said in a text message.

Gordon wants Erap to run and test 'moral backbone' of Filipino voters

RUTH, KHAM RUIZ

Sen. Richard Gordon, a presidential hopeful allied with the Arroyo administration, is urging deposed President Joseph Estrada to run again not only because it will send another the opposition but also because it will put to the rest the "moral backbone" of Filipino voters.

"I would like Mr. Estrada to run if he is allowed under the Constitution and I think the opposition, more than the administration, should be wary of this," said Gordon.

Gordon, who has toyed with the idea of running in 2010 with Cebu Gov. Gwen Garcia as vice president, said this Estrada's decision to run again, albeit disqualified under the law, would be a godsend to the Arroyo administration.

"He will become the lightning rod of all the issues against the government. He will attract the bullets," said Gordon. "His could be the common ruby the President made a deal to free Estrada even before he was punished for his crimes...to divide the opposition."

But Arroyo predicted Estrada is a match after he won convict of plunder.

Gordon has been critical of the pardon granted by the President because he believed that Estrada got off easily.

The senator noted that Estrada spent the last six years in a Tuesday-to-Sunday hotel his plunder case. He was freed even before he spent one day in jail for the crime he committed.

"If he is allowed to run, and I don't think he is allowed to run, I believe that he will get the moral backbone, the moral depths of this entire because the people will be asked to vote for a person who has been convicted and who has never served time," said Gordon. GMA, Cabeza

Rep. Mitra said Estrada "needs to make his presence felt and remind everybody that he is a force to reckon with." With a report from Michael Lim Ubac

Feng shui master: Discord in RP to continue

Transcribed

Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin and several politicians and entertainment personalities.

Problems from within

"Apparently, the source is doing good, but it will be a wise move to pay closer attention to internal affairs because problems could come from within," he said.

The feng shui master said the President will continue to be vulnerable on health problems this year.

"The President, being the central figure in the government, must be more careful with her health," he said.

"Some kind of virus or happening (sic) in the environment could affect her," he said.

"I've told her about this already," he said, pointing to a picture of him shaking hands with the President.

Food-gathering habits

Weng-gungqian explained that the coming Chinese New Year, which officially starts on Feb. 7, 2008, will favor people who take their rice from the bowl of the rat, especially in its food-gathering habits.

He described the "earth rat" as a rodent growing out of its burrow in the ground, carefully sniffing out new possibilities and opportunities. This is unlike ordinary rats that we were signals the beginning of a fresh 12-year cycle in the Chinese astrological calendar, where old ways are discarded and new ideas come to the fore.

Weng-gungqian predicts that the (6) (energy) flow around Metro Manila will continue to suffer from poor feng shui planning of the capital's major physical infrastructure.

He pointed out that the flow of energy through Edsa...the main thoroughfare—continues to be erratic at best, resulting in poor energy circulation for the "earth dragon" that represents the 18-line highway.

MRT restricts energy flow

He said the two "fire dragons," the MRT and LRT rail systems, also restricted the flow of (6) "because they are not in a continuous loop, unlike the trains in other countries."

Finally, Weng-gungqian pointed out that the "water city" represented by the Pasig River remains severely polluted, resulting in mainly negative energy being transformed to the Manila

BEST-SELLER: An image of the figurine of a rat, which is that animal's year in the zodiac calendar, long sits/import Master "Master" Tsi Sui Hsin smirks and makes her forecast at her store 727 Oregon St., Binondo. The Chinese New Year isn't until Feb. 7, 2008 in the Gregorian calendar (Edwin Bacasmas)

cultural complex which straddles the waterway.

In the business arena, the feng shui master said money would not be easy to come by, but added that luck would favor those who are observant, prepared and quick to spot opportunities—an inherent characteristic of the rat.

Money buried deep

"From an economic point of view, the money that you've buried deep within the earth as we will have to dig deep to have some riches and more income in 2008," he said.

Businesses associated with the five elements like telecommunications, land and construction are expected to perform well this year, although short-term investments are to be favored more than long-term investments, he added.

Weng-gungqian said that the capitalism sector and livestock business "must always be prepared for natural disasters," given that the "water element" will be unpredictable this year.

According to Weng-gungqian, people born in the years of the rat, tiger, dragon, horse, monkey, rooster and dog should be "cautious" in 2008 to avoid misfortune.

Rats should be cautious, cases will be lucky, tigers will travel overseas, rabbits will have a quibbling social life, dragons should be careful with money, snakes are on the upswing, horses are unlucky, sheep will have better luck this year, monkeys will have a bumpy road to success, roosters will find luck and intrigue, dogs will have misfortune and trouble, while pigs will see a holistic second half of 2008, he said.

'Very superstitious'

The Rizonelo-based feng shui practitioner Maxima "Maxie" Tu, meanwhile, noted that a growing number of her clients at her Quiapo St. shop are Filipinos rather than the more traditional ethnic Chinese.

She observed that Filipinos are "very superstitious."

"They are now following Chinese traditions and applying them during the Jan. 1 New Year celebrations rather than the Chinese New Year in February," she said.

But she urges no conflict between feng shui—the ancient Chinese art that claims to determine the best location for buildings and their furnishings to enhance the flow of (6)—and the Roman Catholic faith, to which most Filipinos adhere.

"Feng shui is not a religion. It is a guide on how to harness (6)," she said.

Gold is preferred color

Tu said the preferred color for the coming year is gold because of its connection to the element metal, which is (6).

Tu, who shot to fame after being endorsed by television host Kris Aquino, said that special attention should be given to homes and business establishments whose location has the south because of the strong influence of negative energies this year.

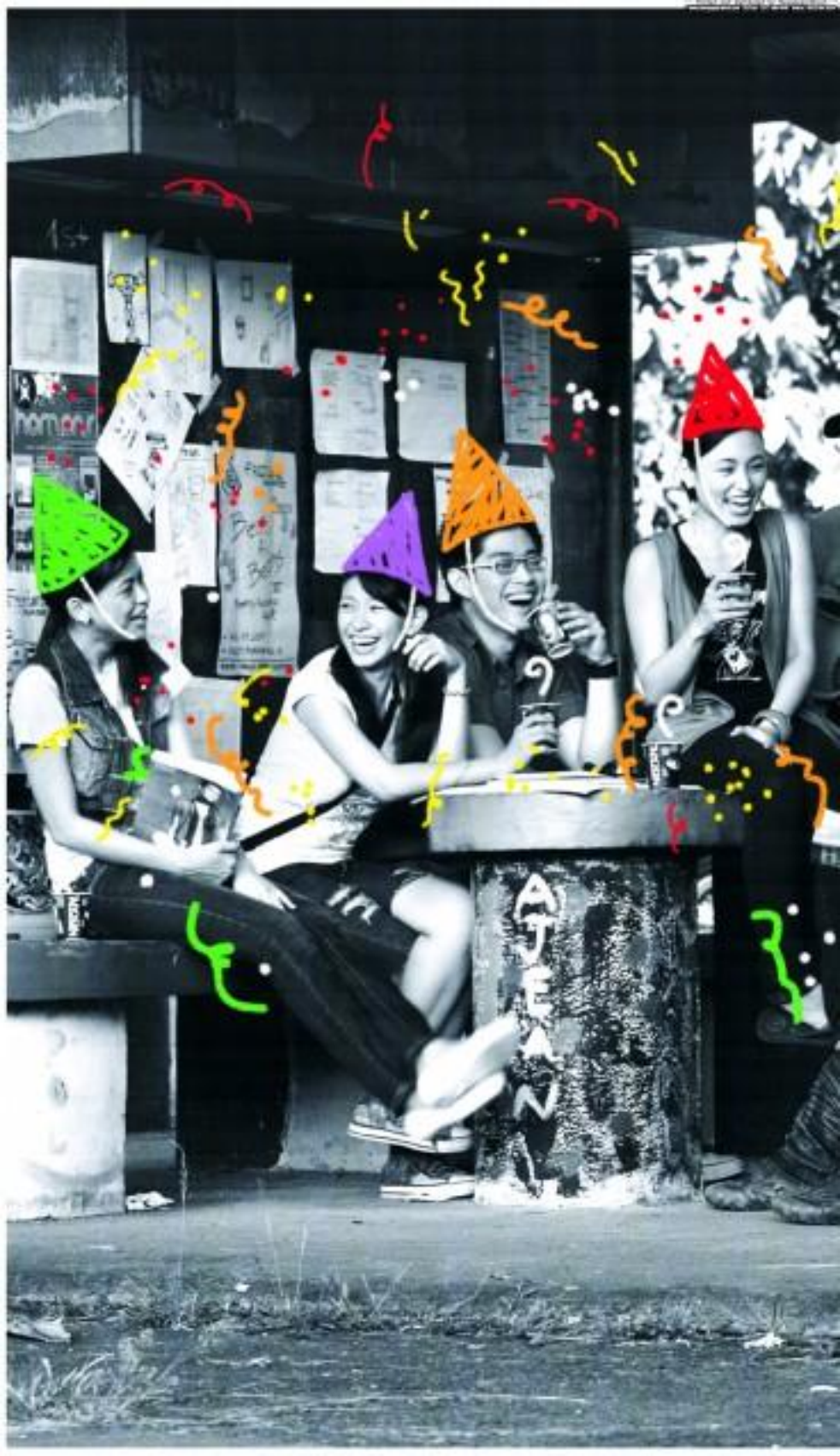
"Those houses or businesses should place lucky charms inside or on their doorways to enhance the (6)," she said.

Luck, regardless of what year a person is born in, can be overcome and bad luck mitigated by the proper use of feng shui, she explained.

Opportunity plus preparation

And while it is unusual for geomancers to agree on a single interpretation of the signs, Tu and Weng-gungqian see eye-to-eye on the prospects of the earth rat year—people will have to seek out opportunities rather than simply wait for them to come their way to happen during years of abundance.

Luck is what happens when opportunity meets preparation, said Weng-gungqian.


AJEAN

1 BIRTHDAY 1 REASON TO CELEBRATE

NESCAFÉ 70 years na kapihan

tuloy ang kwentuhan

IT'S THE NEW YEAR AND NESCAFÉ IS TURNING 70!
THANK YOU FOR THE WONDERFUL MOMENTS.

HERE'S TO MANY MORE YEARS TOGETHER.

1 MOMENT 1 NESCAFÉ

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OPINION

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High hopes

EDITORIAL

A RECENT SOCIAL WEATHER STATIONS SURVEY found that nine out of 10 Filipinos look to the year 2008 with hope rather than fear. Their optimism may be based largely on gut feel, but there is reason to believe that it has factual basis too.

The Asian Development Bank in its Asia Economic Monitor forecasts that the Philippines will slow down somewhat from a strong 2007, but sees gross domestic product growth remaining high at about 6.4 percent in 2008 on strong gains in net exports, private consumption and government spending.

The Economist Intelligence Unit says private consumption will remain the main driver of the economy, although GDP growth will slow down from 6.9 percent in 2007 to an average of 5.2 percent in 2008 to 2008. It sees the peso continuing to remain strong against the dollar and the exchange rate averaging P40.4/$1. More optimistic forecasts predict a P40-41/$1 range. Annual consumer price inflation will remain low but will increase to an average of 3.4 percent over the forecast period. And increasing remittances from overseas Filipino workers will ensure that the current account remains in surplus.

Some economists say that the clouds hovering in the horizon are an increase in the prices of oil in the global market, the subprime problem in the United States and the appreciation of the peso which is hurting the families of OFWs and the export sector.

Another factor that could affect economic performance, particularly of the agricultural sector, is the weather. Pagasa has can yet make a forecast, but if present conditions continue, it appears that the country will not suffer an ill Nino or La Niña this year.

Overall, the economic prospects for 2008 look good, although there remains the nagging question of whether improvements in the economy are seeping down and significantly affecting the lives of the people in the lowest rung of the economic totem pole.

The social indicators are not very reassuring. About 23.8 million Filipinos live below the poverty threshold and 13 percent of the population live in extreme poverty. Because 24 percent of the national budget is allocated to debt service, education and health care do not get enough financing. Prof. Leonor Magtolis-Briones of the UP National College of Public Administration and Governance said that all key indicators on the quality of education are down while government spending on basic health care is being neglected. It is not helping the nation any that thousands of doctors and nurses are being lured away from the country by higher salaries abroad.

A degree of stability can be forecast on the political front. The recent crushing of the Trillanes- and Ung-led mutiny is widely viewed to have strengthened the hand of President Macapagal-Arroyo. The nation appears to be suffering from People Power fatigue and the restless clamor in the military are lying low.

The third impeachment case against Ms Arroyo has been dismissed and new politicians are focusing their attention on the 2010 presidential election. Some eager aspirants are beginning to make noises, and some interesting maneuvers are being floated to test the political waters.

But while there is political stability for now, the Economist Intelligence Unit forecasts that the authority of the President will remain fragile because of continued allegations of corruption against her administration. It says that the charges of corruption may have undermined the military support of the administration, which remains crucial to its continuance in power.

There does not seem to be any prospect that a retaliation can be found to the long-running insurgencies by the New People's Army and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2008 or sometime in the near future. Recently, the President said the government was sure to wipe out the communist insurgency by the time the steps down in 2010. But we doubt whether a largely military approach to the problem would work, considering that the insurgency finds a rich breeding ground in the poverty and misery of the masses.

Summing up, the nation appears headed in the coming year for moderate economic growth and political stability. Reason enough for the overwhelming majority of the people to entertain high hopes for 2008.

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Frugality's shame

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

THE ITCH TO CHARGE CHRISTMAS GIFT ON WITH 120 today—up from only 30 in 1990. But which one hailed P133 million to "expand and renovate" councilors' offices even as indigent sick children were jammed three to a hospital bed?

"City Hall is not Cebu City," greeted Mayor Tomas Osmeña after inaugurating the 28-month overhaul. "This our taxpayers a lot of money.... Here are we going to repay [them]?"

His Honor knows. His South Reclamation project raked every man, woman and child, in Cebu, with a debt repayment burden of P68,034. That's almost twice national levels. A quarter of Cebu's budget is hocked for paying yesYOs. This diced into basic services.

Yet, Osmeña approved add-ons. "I didn't tell no one thing would lead to another and it would cost P130 million," he admitted. That's the cost cooked the P63.4-million contract price by 105 percent.

The splurge continues. The council authorized a P16.7 million loan for a modern air conditioning system. It'd cools 7,500 square meter building, expanded from the original 3,400 square meters.

Councilor Nestor Archival, who oversees the project, boasts of unbudgeted "finishing touches" : electronic voting system, Cebuanjon furniture, donated chandeliers, free elevator. "Hindera, secretary, secretary," as Val Sayson snorted in the "Ibo ning sud."

Is this a "Bahin sa Bisaya" relationship? "Di sabarasi [Bisayanse for], " Osmeña told reporters. But sarcasm is lost on officials' hide.

"This is not a luxury," Vice Mayor Michael Rama insisted. It was "a rightful attempt to restore the dignity to the office of men and women whom the people of Cebu elected.... [It] restores the grandeur of City Hall."

Dignity isn't purged by building price tags. "That's foreign notion," he added.

Only "edifice complex" patients claim so. "Dignity consists in deserving honors, not pursuing them," Aristotle insisted.

Rooted in the spirit, dignity cannot be stripped away. But one may abjectly surrender it. So when did the councilors surrender? Parliament's hesitant decision on a council that robber stamps whatever the mayor dictates? Or when they approved the demolition of isolated high-wage, in-city farms.

"Grandeur" looks different from the awestruck eyes of Cebu City Medical Center's charity patients' ward. Tbc wife and I spend Christmas mornings there.

It has over 20 decrepit hospital beds. Two, often sometimes three, sick kids are jammed into one bed. Some don't rent even a crude sign reads: "Dengue. Caprese Lasa."

Dickied Ill: a gaunt boy coats in fetal position. The pale mask of approaching death is already being traced on his face. The other two patients are listless. This confirms the dry-as-sawdust statistic: chronic hunger stunts one out of every three Cebu kids. And nearly whisper softly: "Two in four children crying (), my brothers." Yet no news come with the years? Elizabeth Barrett Browning asked.

Her chanced across an almost totally blind girl, moping softly a lullaby to herself, in an empty train. She was still at first—the young musician of "old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago." One eye had given way to another, the emaciated mother explained. But it was only to justify that they scraped up enough coins for the journey here. Now it was probably too late to save her sight.

Things for the lullaby does not belong "to an other race of creatures bound on other journeys," as Charles Dickens wrote in Christmas of 1843. "They are fellow-passengers [even of City Hall dignitaries] in the grave."

The hospital pharmacy is perennially short of medicines. A mother mercilessly clutches an filled-term basic prescriptions for her child. She has only P50. But sometimes spent P1.8 million for "architectural finishes." The midterm rest wing is half-finished. For "isolation rooms, " consultants set aside P3.1 million.

There are no hospital linens. "Swaddling clothes" for infants are whatever sheets relatives bring. Or the baby's poor parents scrounge from a councilor's glistening comfort room. "There is enough for man's needs," Mahatma Gandhi once said. "But never enough for his greed."

Cebu is a two international city." Its Chamber's motto: "Gateway to the Philippines" and one of a Third World country: dengue, pneumonia and diarrhea. All are preventable. But they spread like brush fire when poverty interlocks with tainted water and poor sanitation.

City Hall never evolved a sound policy for family health, clinic facilities pay peddlers! It is 10 times the cost of piped waters. Less than half of homes have taps. And helpless ill children pay the unfortunate cost of policy failure.

Indigent parents and volunteers, like Francisco Sionil, pitch in with clinic resources and tireless services. "Hope and grace are raised dignity" activist Helen Graves said. "Love."

Running a "haven of eutrachia," in self-serving luxury, is pathetic for the tragedy is blindness worse than that of the girl with her lullaby refusal to see than a councilor's right to glitzy comfort rests where the child's right to confidence begins.

The vulnerable child has the most urgent call on our conscience. This is a fundamental obligation, accepted by civilized men. Only in service to the weakest do we find human fulfillment.

Dignity may contain what law does not prohibit," the Roman philosopher Seneca once wrote. Go, tell City Hall.

E-mail: juanlmercado@gmail.com

Milestones

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE best of times.

The year began the way it ended, with conventional rapist escaping justice. While the nation was busy exploding firecrackers to drive away the demons, one demon—as in the one right by the corner—drove away in the dead of night. Or was Lance Corporal Daniel Smith who was serving time in a Makati jail for the rape of a Filipina woman in Olongapo.

The year ended with Arroyo, Jalosjos, who was serving two life terms for the rape of a minor, also finding himself a free man—all too briefly. Of course Malacañang ordered him set free for crowless rendered during the 2004 elections, when he participated in the gang rape of a 10-year-old woman named Irene Baylon. His release sparked an uproar, as did Smith's escape, but also for Jalosjos he wasn't on Arroyo's can. And though he tried hard to look like Elvis, he wasn't as good looking as Smith, whom the women outside jail were openly courting and demanding to be freed. Duh to ish Filipina.

Still at the start of the year, Al Gore visited drubbed a dire battle about a dying planet. This time around people were willing to listen, and all in no small way by the terrifying increase of tidal waves, hurricanes and tornadoes, tropical super storms, killer floods, evolcano earthquakes, and other bolts to terrorist natural disasters unheard them, by analysts. Gore would earn from ignored prophet to fixed superstar. He would get both a Nobel Prize and an Oscar for his documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth." Wonder which one he values more.

By contrast, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change released a report that said bluntly the planet would die if countries like the United States and China did not cut down on their carbon emissions. The language left no room for the US to maneuver, having it to concede to the Bali agreements. But it's a testament to America's moral authority to lead the world today that al. Gore has been one of the loop for some time and George W. Bush has been its president all this time.

In blog, the sensational elections pretty much confirmed expectations but offered some surprises as well. Like the 1987 election which was a referendum on Marcos, the May 2007 election was a referendum on GMA, with exactly the same results—only one administration can declare won. Of course there's another one that's occupying a historic seat, but no one believes Miguel Luhiat won anyway.

The surprise came in the form of two things. One was the Senate. The other was that GMA generally did badly contrary to expectations. Did that signify the growing intelligence of the voters, as many observers outlawed? Not entirely. The demise of the entertainers did not usher in high-minded candidates (with exceptions like Pia Cayetano, whom the political gang of Pampanga are now trying to oust), only the return of low-minded hopes.

The other surprise came in the form of Antonio Trillanes barging into the Senate. Nobody gave him much of a chance to win, given that he was jailed and the AFP was bound to bestow said bail to make him lose. Alas (for them), heaven and hell did not vote, earth did and made him senator. The negative perception of his adventure at the Peninsula Manila, I suspect that if he ran for public office again, he would win again. Which says. Filipinos are some rebels, but they do not want military rulers.

The killings found a face in Eddie Barjon, whose tireless quest to find justice for her murdering son, Anton, has become the killings' human conscience. Barjon won the love of the grieving mother, which says a lot more about the obscenity than all the pictures of rotting corpses put together. The killings found a face as well in Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo when the Spanish government gave a medal to her disappearing human rights. If the Spaniards had wanted to be tickularly satirical, like Cervantes, they could not have done a better job.

For the year was not. False Asia made palms go home in Malacañang by coming out with a survey that said Filipinos rate Gloria as the most corrupt president in the country ever—even more corrupt than ferdinand. Educate Bonita dismissed it as "sister perception," which spurred an hysterics reader to remark wryly that all his relatives were probably wrong, they taught him to believe perception was based on observed phenomena, therefore suggesting truth rather than falsehood.

Last year, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo became the longest-serving president of this country after Marcos. "Longest serving" of course is debatable. If Pepe and Mahar's tenures are to be believed, Pres believes she was in 2004, and even dearer believe she serves like is the longest-staying president after Marcos without ever having been voted president.

More than any other year, 2007 was the year of the OFW. Without them, not even spread all over the world, wrecking their asses off to put food on the table of the families they left behind. The export of OFWs was dramatically felt late in the year when, alongside the free fall of the dollar, OFWs brought in record remittances, pushing the GDP growth rate over the 7% mark without sublime irony that the very people who are keeping this country's head above water are half drowning: The same flood of dollars they've brought in has shrunk their income.

I saw my dearest destin and birthin in 2007. It changed the way I see every door friends, both written, went away. They were Mahar Cristobal and Nene Villanueva. But it was also the year when I launched a book of speeches and essays that I'm rather proud of, "Tanggol sa Diyos" (Speak in National Bookstore) and Mercedes grew further as her Lacrosse, nicknamed Jake Cristal.

That was the year that was. I hope this year brings better things, but that has always been in our hands. Anyway.

Happy New Year, everyone.

Treasuring each moment

AMONG THE GIFTS I RECEIVED THIS SEASON was a money from the Holy Land from my tour operator friend Atchie Dupaz of Journeys of Faith. With it were a little rosary, water from the Jordan River, where's some land in another that resembles perhaps the best and most beautiful thought for the old year and the new one that begins today. Titled "Treasure Each Moment," it goes this way: "Never again will this day be lived by any person and its hours. Never again will its joys and dreams all be within your scope. Its treasures each hour, by never again will you be able to use exactly these same golden moments...except in memory."

* * *

As I said last Christmas Eve, this season of grace is an auspicious time to rest from political cares and recall instead events that had meant a lot to us personally in 2007. Earliest last month, my brother-in-law Ben Evangelista, who's now the formidable Nueve Cache Observer of the Ilalim Tribune and now the club's patriarch (my el deer brother finally turning died early in 1990), turned 75. It's an age worth celebrating and to mark it, their sons Peter and Michael and Ben's sister Tweetie and Imelda, and all their kith, and their daughter Pam invited all of us Ed's siblings and Nimfa's sister in law Chandra Cacho to a breakfast at the Manila Polo Club where we had to battled

LETTERS

Worrying is not planning but lack of faith

WE WORRY SO MUCH ABOUT ALMOST everything in this world. We worry about the pressure as well as the future, about our daily needs as well as our future needs. Tuition fees, food costs, water bills, telephone bills, cable bills, you name it. When an emergency comes, there is all the more reason to worry!

Why do we worry so much? Worrying seems to be in our blood, so natural to us. I mean, almost, when we worry do we even think first before worrying? Or worse not. It just happens so instantly right? This is because worrying is related more to our emotions than logic. Specifically, worrying comes from a common emotion called anxiety.

And worrying comes from fear the best way to fight worrying is to control our fears, to remove unnecessary fears. Of course, there is a type of fear that is in fact good – the fear of the Lord, which makes us mend our behavior we fear losing God's love.

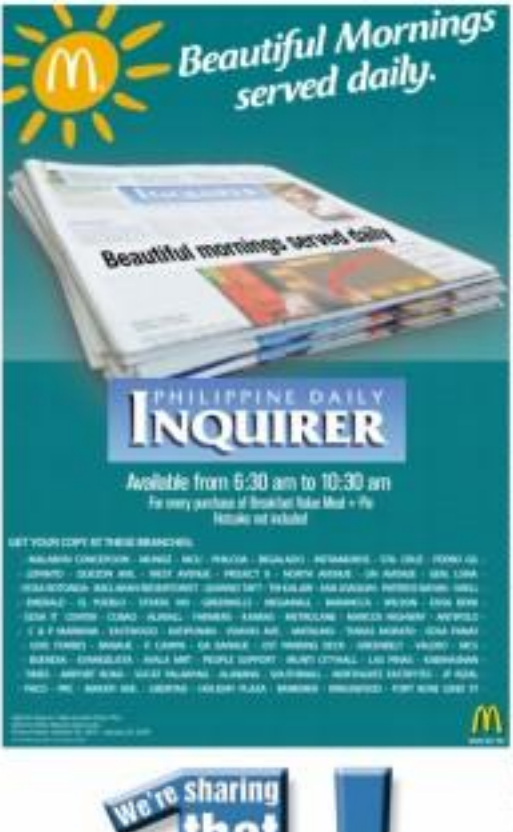
In matters unnecessary fears, we have to know the cause of these fears. The cause of fears is, as is the lack of faith in God. Yes, we fear is situation or a problem because we still do not have enough faith. Think about it. If our faith in God is strong enough, no trial or problem—no matter how hard it is—will break you.

Some people make an excuse to justify worrying, by thinking that worrying is involved in planning. Jesus said, "Do not worry about tomorrow. Doesn't God the Father himself feed the sparrows as they don't die from hunger? How much more you, who are worth more than many sparrows?"

Take note that Jesus is not against planning for tomorrow or the future. He teaches against the evil of worrying as a sign of lack of faith in God. Worrying is not related to planning at all, and we can plan for our future without worrying.

Happy New Year!

—ALEX U. CRAS,
jobmail@ist1.ayahoo.com



Retirees suffer because of agencies' negligence

THIS IS IN REFERENCE TO THE COMMISSION of Finance C. General, titled "GSIS Pension rise inflicts, not the retirees" (Inquirer, 12/19/07).

The Commission for the Insurance Commission already filed 22 civil cases against several local government units for failure or remit or remit their compulsory premium payments or for failure to remit the correct amount of such payments, or for both. In addition to this, 10 cases have been filed before the Ombudsman against a number of local officials for their roles in the failure of their respective LGUs to remit the GSIS premiums.

Prior to filing a case against these erring agencies, the GSIS sends three show cause resolutions demanding them of their obligations or remit to the GSIS, some of them have opted to enter into memoranda of agreements with the GSIS, proposing a plan on how they can pay their premium arrearages on a staggered basis.

The point is, the GSIS has never been remiss in considering these realities of their duty so as to not their pensioners, and GSIS will take all the necessary measures available to enable its members to all concerned pensioners thanks, have not denied, the, instead, the real concern here are the government agencies who are left to suffer for the negligence of their agencies' officers. We are calling on our members to remain vigilant and take the necessary legal action against their negligent employers for ages with General. GSIS members should not be punished—that is, deprived of the retirement benefits due them—for the laxity of their agencies.

—ATTY. E. VILLANUEVA,
vice president,
Public Affairs Office,
Government Service Insurance System,
Financial Center, Pasay City

Benazir: early advocate of the environment

THE PHILIPPINES LOST A STEADFAST AND consistent supporter and pro-democracy activist with the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

The ousted Philippine history 12 years ago, as a participant to one of the most significant world events that tackled the environment and their solutions, the Second of all Environment conferences on global warming and climate change. Then Prime Minister Bhutto was the special guest of honor and speaker at the First Asia Pacific Leaders Conference on Climate Change (ASPAC LCC) held at the Manila Hotel from Feb. 17 to 20 in 1990.

In that conference, a meeting of leaders from 22 Asia-Pacific nations, Bhutto spoke eloquently about the dangers of global warming and called upon urgent attention. Even before the community of nations took notice of these environmental issues, she was already with us in our struggles and advocacies.

The conference was participated in by 44 parliamentarians, 18 ministers, 40 local government executives, eight international agencies, five international environmental NGOs and 20 other foreign participants; it was convened, through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), by the Senate's Committee on Environment, of which I was then chair.

Aside from Bhutto, other speakers in that conference were Vietnam Prime Minister Ukraine Carlos Salonga and then President Fidel Ramos who gave the keynote address.

A product of the ASPAC LCC was the Manila Declaration, which was presented to the Conference of Parties 1 (COP 1) in Berlin, Germany in March 1995. The succeeding COP-2 to COP-13 were, Japan in December 1997.

The "Green Basket" became part of the basis for the deliberations of the Kyoto Protocol, the global treaty to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Only last month, 2007, world leaders again met in Bali, Indonesia to assess the status of the Kyoto Protocol and to negotiate for a new treaty on climate change before 2012, when the Protocol expires.

Even as a young, emerging global leader at age 42, Bhutto in 1993 was already a voice of the environment, calling on world leaders to address global warming in the Manila conference; and a learning democratic giant pushing for democratic reforms in her country and the rest of the free world.

—HERMINIO T. ADVIENTO,
Lucia Uldal,
Antonio Bagacay Tuvera,
& Lupin Sr., Erwina, Manila

The children who go 'caroling' without singing

HOW BAD IS THE FILIPINO MASSIE GRASP of the English language? 'Tis the season of Christmas and the children of the house gods are out to go a few centuries from the more genuine sharing the house-owners in Metro Manila and elsewhere.

So far the past few nights they come to the house and call out loud "mangangaroling po!" without singing a song. I come out and do what I have been doing for years now, giving Christmas-time. In Tagalog, I ask them if they know what caroling means? They reply, "Nakamasa po."

So I go into my spiel of explaining what that word means. They—single or in twos or threes—leave with no ring in words clear around like on school trips, e.g., "bind caring to you"—that's for "glad tidings to you." Another: "Silent night, oh night, lavish joy." I ask them what "silent" means. None of them knows. I ask them if they are smoking. One replies, yes, he is now in first year high. The list is accordingly considerable for looks like a Cadet Corps!

Years ago, I happened to bump into a male student as an elementary school and I asked him why people were joining an apostrophe before "s" to denote plurality (e.g., pluralizing "boy" into "boy's" and "girl" into "girl's"). He replied, "It depends on where it is used." My answers stunned me and he stared away before I got my composure back.

A while back also, I saw a group of children in my pupils in Sitio Libis Pilisa at 10 in the morning and I asked why they were not in school. They replied, "Ngano, no po ang Misa." I asked how long a session was and they replied "four hours."

In several public elementary schools in Metro Manila are conducting three sessions a day to accommodate as many children as they can. For what purpose? So school administrators can tell the President that there's no shortage of classrooms in the library!

I asked a teacher what do the pupils read most, in four hours. I got a blunt reply, "Nothing!" She said that by the time she gets the drop to calm down and everybody seated, the four hours seem to be over. She said that she too had to first "accimodate" herself because of the smell of the children. [Due to poverty they can't take a daily bath or change into clean clothes every day.]

Teachers can teach pupils how to read English words and sentences but it is another matter to get the children to understand the meaning of the words. And where will these children end up to adults in this country where understanding English is a minimum requirement for employment in all business firms and government offices? Never mind maintaining that it is also a requirement for employment abroad.

—ROGER B. MENDOZA,
mendoza@yahoo.com

'Robust economy' enjoyed only by few

I AM JUST WONDERING: IF OUR PEOPLE have adequate purchasing power, how come consumer-ing products are selling those, energy drinks, coffee, shampoo, detergents, cigarettes, toothpaste, ice cream, etc. in small packs or sachets? How come merchants in our markets are selling sugar, salt, cooking oil, pepper, etc. in small packs or plastic bags? How come fish vendors have started putting price tags for a half kilo of fish?

They also come from the supply side know fully well that our people have very limited purchasing power (often with their low income). In more than one government, they can feel the real pulse ("parok," literally speaking) of our people, hence the selling of goods in small quantities [ning-ning] to meet purchases).

I believe that so-called robust economy being proclaimed most proudly by the government is only felt by the people from the AB economic class (a very small percentage of our population) and not by Juan de la Cruz.

—DELIA R. MENDEZ,
Rm 1 Court,
Mabanday, Marikina City

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Bhutto's husband has checkered reputation

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN— Bilawal Bhutto's husband, who took offensive control of his slain wife's party Sunday, is a former Cabinet minister who spent eight years in prison on corruption accusations and is known as "Mr. 10 Percent" for allegedly stashing kickbacks.

In her will, read Sunday, Bhutto named Asif Ali Zardari her successor as head of the Pakistan People's Party in case of her death. But Zardari, who is viewed with suspicion by many Pakistanis, appointed their son Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, an affable 19-year-old's grandmother founded in 1967.

While the elder Zardari is a prominent figure in Pakistani politics, earning a checkered reputation because of allegations that he made big money during Bhutto's government, his son is a more English-speaking, Oxford student who has spent much of his life abroad.

He said at a news conference Sunday that his father will "take care" of the party while he completes his education.

Feudal family

Asif Ali Zardari, 54, who comes from a feudal family, shot to fame after his arranged marriage to Bhutto, who became prime minister for the first time in 1988, less than three months after giving birth to her son. Bhutto's husband is generally blamed for many of her political misfortunes, with her twice being forced out of the prime minister's office over allegations of corruption and misrule.

'Mr. 10 Percent'

Zardari was jailed for the first time in 1990 on charges ranging from murder to bank fraud, when Bhutto's first government was dismissed. He was released in 1993 and acquitted of the charges, including the accusation that he acted to extort several million dollars from a British businessman by smashing a bomb to his leg. Zardari and his supporters said the charges were politically motivated.

Zardari became investment minister in Bhutto's second government. He was nicknamed "Mr. 10 Percent" for allegedly skimming off commissions on government contracts. He was also accused of squeezing waste money on projects and the agencies he had them in the prime minister's residence, while the poor lacked bread to eat.

He was jailed a second time in 1996 over corruption allegations and alleged involvement in an attack on Bhutto's brother, Murtaza, who died in a shootout near his home in Karachi.

After years in prison, facing marathon trials in different courts in the country, Zardari was freed in December 2004 and left Pakistan on five such his family in the United Arab Emirates.

Zardari is suffering from various ailments, including a heart problem and back pain that his aides say he developed because of prolonged imprisonment.

Resembles mother

Little is known about his son, Bilawal, who has spent most of the past eight years living with his family in the UAE.

He closely resembles his mother, with a long face, sharp nose, dark, keen eyes and thick eyebrows.

While his father addressed the media in the local Urdu language Sunday, Bilawal spoke only in English, raising questions about his facility with Pakistan's national language. Bhutto herself spent much of her youth abroad and initially struggled with Urdu in her early years in politics.

In his brief remarks, the younger Zardari vowed to continue "the party's long and historic struggle for democracy ... with renewed vigor."

"My mother always said democracy is the best revenge," he said.

Bilawal is believed to share some of his father's feudal positions, a love for horses and horse riding, target shooting and taekwondo, in which he is a black belt. AP

Benazir Bhutto's son chosen symbolic leader of mother's party

Propaganda

ing Thursday

The Election Commission planned to discuss the timing of the polls Monday.

A successful vote would bolster US-backed plans to restore democracy to the nuclear-armed country and to hinder rising Islamist extremism.

Rioting subsided Sunday after demonstrators that left at least 44 dead and caused tens of millions of dollars in damage, but bitterness remained over the government's response to the gun and suicide attack that killed Bhutto.

The central executive committee of her Pakistan Peoples Party met Sunday and handed the leadership of the party to the eldest of her three children, Bilawal Zardari, who accepted but said he would first complete his studies at Oxford University.

He said his father, Asif Ali Zardari, who was officially designated co-chairman, would be the effective party leader.

'Best revenge'

"The party's long struggle for democracy will continue with renewed vigor," Bilawal told a news conference that was repeatedly interrupted by sons. Send them from Bhutto's supporters. "My mother always said democracy is the best revenge."

At a news conference on Sunday, Zardari said the opposition party—Pakistan's largest—had no confidence in the government's ability to bring the killers to justice and urged the United Nations to establish a commission like the one investigating the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The decision about the party's future now rests in a closed-door meeting in the sprawling family estate in the south of the country where the two-time former prime minister grew up.

Bhutto's grandfather was a senior figure in the movement that helped Pakistan split from India and lead it to independence in 1947. Her father—Pakistan's first elected prime minister—founded the Pakistan People's Party in 1967 and its socialist norms since then has largely depended on the Bhutto name.

Power broker

Zardari is a power broker who served as investment minister in Bhutto's second government. He was nicknamed "Mr. 10 Percent" for allegedly skimming off commissions on government contracts. He was also accused of squeezing waste money on projects and the agencies he had them in the prime minister's residence, while the poor lacked bread to eat.

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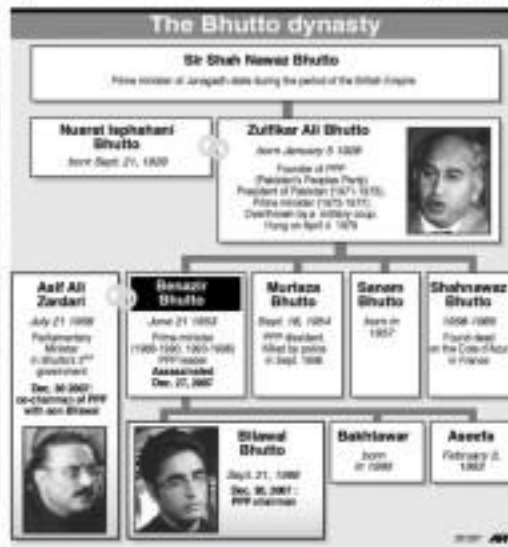
THE SPITTING IMAGE of his mother, Bilawal (right) is a law student in Oxford and loves horses like his father Asif Ali Zardari.



Behind 'Hapag' painting is a story of redemption

Propaganda

lead to be removed, causing the loss of his left kidney.

It was a devastating experience. Even though the surgery was successful, Joey took him a depression which he likened to being trapped in a dark, lonely, deep well. He rarely socialized with the outside world, preferring to interact with friends and family.

He became a complete recluse, locking himself inside his room. Food would be left on a tiny metallic tin door. He stopped showering and bathing. He started hitting himself and hurting himself.

His wounds would not heal, and he developed diabetes, psychosis and suicide, even as he maintained a stubborn faith and hope of deliverance in God's goodness.

He prayed for God to throw him a rope or let him jump into fire. He said he would have grabbed one hand with broken glass.

Rebirth, new career

One day in 2005, during one of his darkest moments of anguish and despair, Joey noticed a faint light shimmering in from the window. Engulfed by its warmth, he drew the curtains aside. Instantly, he was filled to by light that seemed to envelop his whole body in a warm embrace.

That was the start of Joey's rebirth, the beginning of a new life, and though he did not realize it at the time, a new career. He suddenly felt the urge to pick up a paintbrush for the first time in his life and, despite lacking any training, he started to paint. To his surprise, he discovered he could draw, starting with human ears, a nose, a face. Like a little child visited over a new discovery, he was overcome with excitement. He turned his entire house into a gallery, filling up all the walls, except for one in the dining room.

While thinking about what to put up on that last remaining wall, he was struck by an idea. He felt overwhelmingly compelled about the food served at mealtimes, receiving better fare. That made him decide to paint something that would give them a strong visual reminder of God's blessings, something that would empower all points of his ears and awakening into one compelling picture—the Hapag.

In search of subject matter, he set off for various depressed areas—to the Payatas dump, underneath bridges, and to cemeteries where he eventually found his 12 little "apostles" with whom he shared Jollibee happy meals, Lucky Me noodles and RTD juice. He took still photos of the 12, then returned to his room and started to paint. It took him only six weeks to complete the mural which measured 10 ft by 6 ft.

Reminder to his kids

Hapag was meant to be a reminder to his kids, but while working on the piece, Joey became convinced that it also became a reminder to himself.

The painting no longer remained a flat picture on canvas, but started to teach me and touch him. He began to see him-self in different stages of his life marked by emptiness, brokenness and powerlessness. He even began to question his own motives, realizing he was simply "using" the poor as a reminder to his children.

Joey was moved to search for the 12 children again in that journey retracing his steps, he also found himself and found God. He says he learned so much—the nobility of spirit in the children who refused to give up amid wrenching poverty; the bravery and courage to keep going despite all odds in Judith, a member of the Sigue-Sigue gang, those who lived in the cemetery Joyce, siblings Ani and Revel, Dodoy whom he found under the bridge.

Gospel truths in poverty

He realized the children could take care of themselves and survive in the urban jungle, so that in a spiritual sense, it was the children who "fed" him as he rediscovered the truths of the Gospel amidst poverty such as Jesus' parting message to St. Peter, "If you love me, feed my sheep."

Hapag did not merely emanate from the artist. Being a socially relevant illumination of 21st century life, a "window to Heaven," or a canvas of memory, it did not just evoke admiration. The painting influenced public opinion and motivated people to act.

Joey started to receive calls and donations which he channeled through Gawad Kalinga. Most donors were not rich but middle-class Filipinos here and abroad. Joey recently learned that one of the donors—he sent $1,300, the sum of a OF home two years ago—was himself in dire straits, living in Dubai as a California basement with his four children, having lost his job in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attack.

Jewel of a donation

Another overseas Filipino living in Australia sensed a piece of jewelry valued at $1,300. Every night, she would admire and kiss her jewel before hiding it under her pillow and going to sleep. But then she learned about Hapag and the plight of the children. She promptly donated the piece of jewelry to Bonnie a Gawad Kalinga house.

To date, benefactors have contributed $15,600 (12 x $1,300), but because of the signal price appreciation, the GK houses, due for turnover on Dec. 15, will need an additional P500,000. Donations may be forwarded to Gawad Kalinga.]

Joey has painted several other luscious works, one of which was that of an old man embracing the Lord, a depiction of the prodigal son who had returned and was forgiven by his father. The subject was an inmate at a home for the elderly the 83-year-old Mang Crispin who came from a well-to-do family and had been abandoned by his seven children. Moved by his plight, Joey adopted Mang Crispin who now lives with him in his house.

Accidental reunion

Mang Crispin has his own poignant story to tell. One day, he tripped and fell in the Velasco house, sustaining a head injury. He was rushed to an ambulance to a nearby hospital. At the emergency room, he was attended to by a doctor whose surname caught his attention as it was the same as his (the name is being withheld to protect the identity of the family). The doctor turned out to be his grandson, By God's design, an accident became a chance for reunion.

Joey who initially made his mark as a business entrepreneur, has gone on to write, direct, photograph and produce five cinema films on Hapag and Mang Crispin.

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FACT #1 **WHAT IS GLUTATHIONE?**

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Common Name - Reduced L-Glutathione
Chemical Name - Gamma-L-Glutamyl-, L-Cysteinylglycine or L-Γ glutamyl-cysteinylglycine

REDUCED L-GLUTATHIONE simply means it is safe for oral intake.
UNREDUCED GLUTATHIONE means "metabolically unsafe" not consumable for oral intake and it doesn't mean that 500mg preparation can reducing it to 250mg.

FACT #2 **PROPER DOSAGE INTAKE**

FOR ANTIOXIDANT AND ANTI-AGEING EFFECT: Take 10mg of Glutathione for every bodykilogram / day
ex. 50 kilo person x 10mg of Glutathione = 500mg Glutathione or 1 capsule of Lucida-Ds

FOR SKIN WHITENING SIDE-EFFECT: Take 20mg per / kilogram/body weight per / day
ex. 50 kilo person x 20mg of Glutathione = 1,000mg Glutathione or 2 capsules of Lucida-Ds / day

FACT #3 **COST EFFECTIVE / SAVE MORE THAN Php. 20.00 PER DAY**

Why take 250mg Glutathione preparation which cost Php 38.25 / per capsule x 2/day = Php 76.50 when you can take 500mg Lucida-DS for only Php 56.00 a capsule. You can save more than Php 20.00 per day

Price Comparison of Some Popular Glutathione Preparation in the Market as of Dec 2007

BRANDS	COMPONENTS	STRENGTH	PACKAGING	PRICE	PRICE PER 500MG	REMARKS
Brand M	Glutathione Alpha Lipoic Acid Vitamin C Silicon Dioxide	250mg 50mg 112.5mg no other ingredients	60 caps	P2,295	P 76.50	- Undersized / Poor Patient Compliance - This oral format highly questionable by clinicians. Silicone Dioxide (Uricid be taken by patients w/ thyroid problems and also increases risk of Hypertension and cardio vascular diseases.
Brand S	Glutathione Alpha Lipoic Acid Vitamin C	500mg 50mg 100mg	30caps	P1,800	P 60.00	- Question in origin - Glutathione are easily destroyed by heat. Blister packaging subjects the capsule to heat.
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Across the NATION

US soldiers say sorry for Sulu hospital closure fiasco

ZAMBOANGA CITY—US SOL... direct to Sulu have apologized for ordering hostile officials to shut down the government-run Hospital in Panamao on Sulu on night, Sulu Gov. Abdusakur Tan said yesterday.

Earlier, Dr. Ishik Lukkoo, chief of the Panamao district hospital, said US forces led by a Master Sergeant Norberg, have threatened to shoot anybody seen at the hospital premises after 6 p.m.

"I take back those words and I am apologizing, it's unfortunate but it was not really the real intention. Our real intention was to prevent the people but recognize those locals took the order[,] we were just misunderstood," Tan quoted Maj. Eric Pahlter as saying during a "Talk to face confrontation" with Lukkoo on Tuesday morning.

Pahlter is commander of Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) Sulu Forward Base based in Camp Teodulfo Bautista in Jolo.

Tan said he ate the meeting up. It was also attended by other government officials.

The incident reported the Nov. 30 closure order issued in Lukkoo and staffers of the Panamao district hospital but US officials denied there was such an order.

"I didn't know how formal all that was and where you are getting that information and I just wondered who your sources were," Lt. Commander Melissa Schwamm, public affairs officer of the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTFP) based here said yesterday.

Schwamm denied having a Norberg in their list of 324 personnel in Sulu.

"I don't know specifically who that is (Norberg) it's almost a blender as they point and I don't know who gave you that name and how you got that name," she said.

Tan, who told the Inquirer by phone that he considered the entire rude, confirmed that Norberg is one of the five US servicemen assigned in Panamao.

"We should not let it pass," he said.

Tan said during the meeting, he told Pahlter and two other American military officials that they are not authorized to impose rules in Sulu.

"We don't have the right to impose rules [on] any of our personnel here, you don't have any authority and if you have anything to report [on], inform the AFP and the AFP will deal with us," he told. Arlie Alipala, Inquirer Mindanao

Blast, fire wound 3, destroy firecracker stalls in Bocaue

BOCAUE, BULACAN—At least three people, including two members of a TV news crew, were hurt while 10 stalls were gutted when a stall selling firecrackers in Barangay Turo here exploded early yesterday and started a fire, police said.

Senior Insp. Rhodino Andaya, police chief here, said the blast hit the stall owned by Rose Navarro at 10:15 a.m. The fire ensued by the blast spread to nearby stalls in Purok6, a designated area for firecracker stalls near the Bocaue exit of the North Luzon Expressway.

Andaya said Rodolfo Magpantay, 43, who was tending one of the stalls, suffered burns in the face and legs and was taken to the Sta. Maria General Hospital.

Andaya said Christopher Pineda, a technical crew member, and Fernando Malingit, security guard, both accompanying a news team of GMA 7, were not taken to a hospital because they suffered only minor injuries.

Reports said the GMA 7 crew was in the area to cover the New Year's fire sale of firecrackers in the town, considered the "firecracker capital" of the country.

Andaya said most stall owners and their helpers in the area left their stalls after they heard the blast and noticed that a fire had started.

He said witnesses ran a helper in Navarro's stall putting together pieces of "tores" (a product with at least 1,000 pieces of the firecracker "five star" strung together) on a table. The product which is a super accidentally started a lighted cigarette butt nearby.

Andaya said the firecrackers exploded and its sparks reached the pile of other products in Navarro's stall that caused the blaze and fire.

Residents said many buyers were in the area when the explosion happened.

Andaya said at least P15 million worth of products and property was lost in the fire.

Lawyer Carlo Santiago, owner of a three-story building across Pyrotella, said he would sue Antonio Gloqueza, the area's operator, for negligence.

Santiago said parts of his building, especially its windows, were damaged following the explosion. He said the damage would reach at least P100,000.

At least seven vehicles, including one owned by Gloqueza's son, were damaged.

Sept. Allen Bautista, Bulacan police director, said the blast was the eighth explosion involving a firecracker and pyrotechnic stall or makeshift factory in the province in 2007.

Earlier, firecracker and pyrotechnic manufacturers in the province said 2007 was one of the worst years for the industry as the government's efforts to discourage Filipinos from using deadly products have resulted in less sales.

Rolando Bonilla, vice president of the Philippine Pyrotechnic Manufacturers and Dealers Association Inc., said advertisements on radio, TV and newspapers on the supposed dangers of using these products have discouraged people from buying them.

Bonilla said government-sponsored plugs against the industry and various campaigns launched by the Department of Health, the police and local governments have hurt the industry the most.

An official of the National Bureau of Investigation expressed disappointment at the fire, saying it was an indication that some workers and owners of firecracker stalls were not heeding NBI advice.

The bureau recently deployed bomb experts in Bocaue to inspect factories and give tips on the proper handling and storage of gunpowder and other chemicals used for firecrackers.

"We've already given them lectures in order to avoid firecracker-related fires and accidents that usually claim the lives of people and cause damages to properties," lawyer Romulo Asis, chief of the NBI Antiterrorism Division, said, admitting that he was dismayed over the Bocaue fire. *Carmela Reyes, Inquirer Northern Luzon and Tina Santos in Manila*

SCENE marked at the site of the Bocaue firecracker explosion.

1 dead as fire destroys ancestral house in Lucena

LUCENA CITY—A MAN DIED and at least 12 families here were rendered homeless as fire destroyed an ancestral house yesterday.

The fire, believed caused by a burned TV set, started at about 1:30 p.m. and gutted the old home of the Ocsio-Chan on Hermosa Street, Tevet corner Ocampo in Barangay Ilaya.

Police identified the dead man as Wilfredo Labay, 38, whose body was found by firemen in one of the bedrooms on the second floor.

One of the five victims, Clinton Jake Lazo, 13, whose family was living on the second floor, said Labay was sleeping in one of the second floor bedrooms.

Lazo called out firemen when he saw flames in the bedroom.

"There were no firemen's apparatus," he told police investigators.

Lazo said the head hung some from the TV set. It was followed by a spark, he said, that started the fire.

The blaze's wooden house was considered one of the oldest in the city.

According to village chair Ayang Lawrence, all the families residing in the burned house were relatives.

In 2006, a deadly fire occurred here on New Year's Eve leaving 13 people dead and millions of pesos worth of pieces of property destroyed.

The 2006 blaze was triggered when a resident lit up a firecracker on one his merchandise but instead of shooting up, the rocket accidentally landed on a pile of pyrotechnic inside a store near the public market.

The resident set off a massive explosion that caused the fire.

In Cavite, police arrested a man who allegedly started a 20-minute fire which razed several firecracker stalls and damaged a public market in Navarro town early morning Monday.

Supt. Edgardo Rogero, Navarro police chief, identified the arrested suspect as Albert Espinoza, 31.

Rogero said they arrested Espinoza after an 8-year-old girl identified him as the man who threw a lighted cigarette at one of the stores selling firecrackers.

Rogero said Espinoza was a barred drug addict. *Jeffrey T. Mallari Jr. and Marlon Ramos, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

10,000 families still homeless in Bicol despite ₱750M

LEGAZPI CITY—MORE THAN a year after Typhoon "Reming" ravaged the Bicol Region, more than 10,000 families who lost their homes in the storm have yet to be given permanent settlement in Albay, almost hundreds of millions of pesos have already been spent for rehabilitation efforts.

At least 6,892 more homes and 3,643 lots are needed, which will take approximately ₱800 million and 46 hectares of land, National Housing Authority regional director Rafael Porfirio said.

In the aftermath of Reming, the National Disaster Coordinating Council listed a total of 233,968 houses destroyed in Bicol, 134,394 of which were in Albay.

₱750M in funds

Under the ₱8-billion Calamity Assistance Rehabilitation Effort (Care) funds, NHA listed was allocated around ₱750 million for the purchase and development of lots in the cities and the purchase and distribution of housing materials.

The funds were supposed to benefit at least 35,100 families, Porfirio said.

So far, around ₱300 million has been spent to buy 7,220 lots in Albay, covering a total of 96.4 hectares in at least 14 resettlement sites.

Housing materials, such as roofing sheets and nails, were also purchased for 5,800 families in the Albay and Camarines provinces, with distribution ongoing for around 10,000 more families across Bicol.

₱250M for Camarines Sur

The last ₱250 million of the Care funds is currently being used for the development of resettlement sites in the provinces of Camarines Sur, Catanduanes and Sorsogon, and for the purchase of additional sites in Albay.

The development includes the surveying and clearing of the land, building road networks and constructing drainage systems and waterlines.

Until now, none of the land development projects in seven Bicolnol areas in Albay has been completed, with construction management organizations opting to construct housing units in undeveloped sites.

No-site development

In Ibaan II of the Antang Resettlement Area in Daraga, Albay, for example, records from the NHA show that 90 percent of the houses have already been completed by various NGOs, but only 41.4 percent of site development has been accomplished.

Robleto attributed the slow site development to the delayed release of the ₱750 million Care funds, which was only issued to the NHA in June 2007.

Some land development contracts, namely for the Sta. Domingo, Tuaon, Tagaytay and Polangui resettlement sites in Albay, ended up being awarded as late as November 2007.

Time line

"Contractors are required in Bicol site development within three to four months. But it usually takes five to six months since we still have to conduct pre-bidding activities such as consolidating with local governments units for the identification of possible sites," Porfirio said.

At least five more permanent resettlement areas are needed for Albay alone, he added.

Displaced families that have yet to be given permanent homes will stay in transitional houses made of light materials.

"We are now looking at site acquisition in the municipality of Daraga, and in the villages of Sta. Misericordia, Banquerohan and Tayum in Legazpi City," Porfirio said.

NHA-Bicol aims to complete all projects by March 2008, he added. *Jaymee T. Gamil, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

A BOAT returns to grass land near the slopes of Mayon volcano, a sign that the area is beginning to return to life following a devastating lahar and mudslide that killed thousands.

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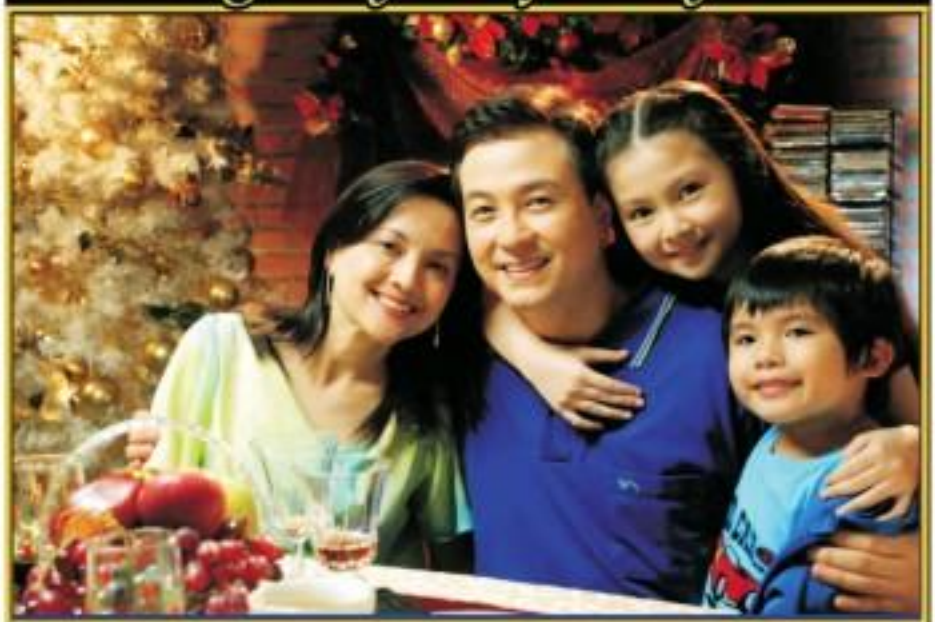

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GMA told: Mend fences among education execs

BACOLOD CITY—PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo spent New Year's Eve with isolated and local school officials at the presidential Malacañan base, discussing the future of education for the remaining years of her term.

Armando Galinda, concurrent vice president of the University of Baguio, said the group asked the President to help untangle what has become the "disjointed direction" of government agencies administering the schools system in the country.

Mr. Arroyo and Education Undersecretary Ramon Bacani led a three-hour round-table session with about 20 representatives of private and government-run colleges and universities in Northern Luzon, among them the University of the Philippines Baguio and the Philippine Military Academy, to review the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (Mtpdp) that has fought a protracted "turf" war for dwindling government resources, Galinda said.

By "protecting their turfs," these agencies hope to outmaneuver local advantages to recognize their respective solutions to the educational crisis, he said.

Malacañang requires these agencies to impose policy reforms for the teaching of the English language and marks statistics because of recent surveys that show elementary and high school students graduating with poor English and math proficiencies, Galinda said.

But the bureaucracy has hurt the way government administers schools and universities, he said.

Both DepEd and CHED have different processes for accrediting private schools, "which has confused many of us," he said.

Galinda, a former Coalition director of the Department of Trade and Industry, said the agencies and the schools agreed to hold an education congress by the end of this month in Bacolod to "develop measures" for the Philippine school system.

Bacolod, CHED Cordillera director said Mr. Arroyo directed Bacani and officials of CHED and the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) to set up a mechanism that would forge a "unified direction" for CHED, DepEd and Tesda.

Galinda promised to the President a situationer from the perspective of private educators, after Dr. Rhoie Yabusin, presidential assistant for education, and her team presented the task force's findings to the school heads. Manuel Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

INPUT? Eraldo Opaso, who is serving a life sentence, guards the gate of San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm Colony

Rapist Jalosjos makes quiet prison busy

ZAMBOANGA CITY—CHILD rapist Romeo Jalosjos has brought the San Ramon Prison and Penal Farm Colony back in the country's map.

People who are entering the prison compound told Cebu Times that the facility was literally blown outside the community as it hosts small Jalosjos, a five-year congressman who was convicted of statutory rape, was brought inside it Jan. 23.

"We are peaceful here. No one even bothered to find out about our situation until one highly controversial convict arrive in," jailguard Jonray Mina said.

Edgar Aranas, Political Science professor at the Western Mindanao State University (WMSU), agreed.

"The Calzadas's incarceration at San Ramon puts the facility back to (its) one country's historical map," Aranas said.

"Our penitentiary is the same notorious facility that the symbol of impregnable and unyielding justice through (out) the corridors of time," Aranas said.

Based on Bureau of Corrections records, San Ramon was established Aug. 11, 1870. It was considered the second largest of the nine prisons built in the country. Its primary purpose was to detain Muslim rebels and those who fought the Spaniards.

The facility, which faces the Jolo Sea, had Spanish-inspired architecture.

But some of the basic structures inside the facility need restoration repair and rehabilitation.

Eraldo Opasar, one of the trustees inside the facility, showed Cebu Times the guard house where he is assigned.

The guard house's window and its floor were dilapidated, and its 10-meter metal bar which served as wall black is highly corroded internally.

While other penitentiaries in the country are surrounded by high walls and towers, San Ramon looks like a school standing some 500 meters from the main highway.

Mina said most of those committed to the facility are informed convicts who enjoy a status of "trustee," like Opasar.

Deputy Supt. Carlos Espinosa refused to be interviewed by the Inquirer.

But Mina and Opasar said since Jalosjos came, the facility has become very busy as the child rapist receives visitors regularly.

One of the guards, who refused to be named, said with Jalosjos inside their facility, "we have stopped knowing what it's like to rest." Julie S. Alipala, Inquirer Mindanao

Puerto execs stop smuggling of live fish at city airport

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—CITY officials in Palawan province on Monday stopped the illegal shipment of 171 pieces of live reef groupers fish at the Puerto Princesa International Airport.

Mayor Edward Hagedorn has suspended three personnel of the city government's Bantay Dagat (naval unit) monitoring illegal fishing activities, on suspicion of connivance with the traders and cancelled the business permit of fish trader Manny Cuping, the airport's registered owner.

Hagedorn also called for an investigation of the possible connivance of airport and airline personnel who were involved in handling the cargo.

Scary scenario

"What if instead of live fish, the shippers smuggle liquid bombs? The security of life and airport officials is very lax and it is a major cause for concern," he told the Inquirer.

The pieces of live reef groupers, estimated to cost over P200,000 in Manila, were stashed in three boxes mixed among a legal cargo of frozen dead fish.

Hagedorn also ordered the immediate release of the red groupers at the Puerto Princesa Bay.

Puerto Princesa City has imposed a total ban on live fish trading, although the practice is allowed in other parts of the province, particularly in Coron, northern Palawan, which is currently the main transshipment area for live fish trading in Palawan.

Cyanide in the seas

Puerto's live fish ban is related to the phenomenon of cyanide fishing which is commonly practiced by illegal fishermen to catch live groupers.

Cyanide poisoning is a major cause of coral reef destruction. Biodiversity-rich, invasive branches known

OVERSIZED FIRECRACKERS

These oversized firecrackers are known in the underground firecracker trade as "Dilaosa," named after the former Mary Jo Dilao who led a roaring ex-Gatorazed and became a Senate seat. The sale of these fireworks is banned but some manufacturers manage to smuggle them into the hands of those who dare light these monsters up.

NEWSBRIEFS

Cyberspace makes charity work

BANGA, Mt. Davao del Sur—It was an idea conceived in cyberspace, but after several e-mail exchanges and chats, they agreed to come home to Bonaldan, Davao del Sur, for a rare undertaking.

On Dec. 28-31, OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) from the town held a medical mission on their way of sharing whatever blessings they enjoyed from working in other countries.

"The goal was simple: help our town mates in any way we can," said Lolo Hugana Reyes, president of the Association of Bonaldan Residents (ABR).

Orlando B. Dinoy, Inquirer Mindanao

Cop seeks relief of cop

DAVAO CITY—Bonaldan list police director Senior Supt. Samuel Mina has sought the relief of Chief Insp. Cesar Calubad, the city's police chief in a letter sent to Mayor Rodrigo Duterte this week. Mina's said that Calubad had been negligent in his duties and responsibilities.

Mina specified several unsolved crimes here, which he blamed on Calubad. The latest was the heist of the local office of money transfer company MGRI.

Latosa said he was not inclined to replace Calubad.

Orlando B. Dinoy, Inquirer Mindanao

It's cops' turn to do good

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—Orphans, the elderly, flood victims and poor hospital patients, and those living in depressed areas here got the surprise of their lives when police officers came knocking and gave them gifts and other goodies on Dec. 28.

Chief Supt. Felizardo Serapio, Central Mindanao police director, said the gift and goodies were the contribution of the men and women of this region's police force.

Serapio said police officers started piling up their collections, "mostly clothing," since August.

Serapio said the original plan was to distribute gifts only to depressed areas, however, he then agreed with colleagues.

Ayoko Zonio, Inquirer Mindanao

Better health service promised

DUMAGUETE CITY—The Negros Oriental provincial government will give more focus to the hospital system and health service in the province this year.

Gov. Emilio Macias II, in a year-ender press conference at the Capitol here Dec. 28, said special attention would be given to the establishment of the Provincial Hospital Insurance in Negros Oriental (PHINO), designed to provide free hospitalization to indigent patients in the province.

Macias, a doctor by profession, said the PHINO would be other than by Health Insurance system, the Philhealth, has been unable to do.

Benny Abunda, Inquirer Visayas

70-yr-old Swiss found dead

CEBU CITY—A 70-year-old Swiss national was found dead inside the room of an apartment in Betty Lu Compound on V. Manalo Street, Camputhaw, Cebu City Dec. 28.

Police identified the victim as Roger Bertschinger who suffered multiple stab wounds in the body.

Hernando Inciong, officer of the Cebu City Police Office (CCPO) have yet to identify the killers or establish the motive of the killing.

The caretaker of the apartment, Josephine Rollon, discovered the body of the Swiss national at 2 a.m. Friday after a neighbor told her that the light in the room was still on although it was daytime.

The victim's fiancée Dorotia was also missing.

Jhunnex Napallacan, Inquirer Visayas

Southern Leyte schools get books

MAASIN, Southern Leyte—An elementary school and two high schools in this town were the latest beneficiaries of free books from the Gawad Kalinangan, Inc. Foundation Philippines and the Army's 43rd Infantry (Wa Fasenki) Battalion based here.

Lt. Col. Hilario Lazarraga, 43rd IB commander, and Cebu City Mayoral Staff Director Alfredo Abellanosa handed over the books donated by the Ayala Foundation Philippines Book for Kids, a 610-based organization that gives books to day care workers, schools, and municipal and city libraries in the country.

The books, which numbered over 600 were for the principal and librarians of the Obulbon Elementary School, Consolacion National High School and Tomlinson National High School in the presence of the schools' teachers and students.

Jun Ureta, Inquirer Visayas

Army's priority in 2008: Negros NPAs

By Marian B Burgos Jr.
Inquirer Visayas

ILOILO CITY—GOVERNMENT troops in the Visayas will refocus its counter-insurgency operations from Cebu and Bohol Islands last year to Negros Island this year, an army spokesperson said.

Lt. Col. Ernesto de Asis, public information officer of the Army's 6th Infantry Division (Dinfd), said Negros Island would be the main priority of the Dinfd in its operations.

The Dinfd covers Western and Central Visayas and includes the islands of Panay, Negros, Bohol, Cebu and Siquijor. The provinces of Iloilo, Aklan, Capiz and Antique are on Panay Island while Negros Occidental and Negros Oriental are on Negros Island. Bohol, Cebu and Siquijor—all in Central Visayas—...an island provinces.

De Asis said the change of focus is based on their gains against Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP/NPA) rebels in Central Visayas (Region 7).

The 2nd Scout said it aims to "clear" northern Cebu of NPA guerrillas by the end of the year and to also a guerrilla-front in Bohol in the same period.

Negros Island accounts for half of the 32 NPA guerrilla fronts in Central and Western Visayas, according to Dinfd commander Maj. Gen. Juvenal Marzan in an earlier interview. Panay has four guerrilla fronts while Cebu and Bohol Islands have one each.

The Dinfd will deploy two battalions (around 1,000 soldiers) in Negros, among the areas in the country where the NPA has a considerable presence.

Around 1,000 Citizens' Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) members have also been deployed in Western and Central Visayas. These include four Cafgu companies in Negros Occidental, two companies in Bohol and a company in Cebu.

The CPP and NPA in Panay Island bolstered the troop deployment and the claims of success of the Dinfd in its counter-insurgency campaign.

In a pre-Christmas statement marking its 39th founding anniversary on Dec. 26, the CPP's Panay Regional Committee said the CPP/NPA and underground organizations in Panay have grown in strength in the past year.

Rebel leaders Conchita Asunsio said membership in revolutionary mass organizations in the countryside increased by 47 percent while the NPA guerrilla on the island nearly doubled, increasing by 83 percent. The CPP membership also grew by 20 percent, she said.

"Such expansion is unprecedented since the Second Rectification movement in 1994," said Asunsio.

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COME BLOW YOUR HORN Vendors do brisk business selling homemade horns along Manila's Roxas Boulevard before the New Year countdown.

Workers close Skyway for 2 hours

Indonesian company takes over operations of PSC starting today

By Julie M. Aurelio, Nico T. Dicksondra and Jeneuve Reyes

TRAFFIC ON THE SOUTH LUZON EXPRESSWAY (SLEx) was paralyzed for two hours yesterday morning as toll workers protested today's takeover of the Philippine Skyway Corp. (PSC) by an Indonesian firm.

The transfer of skyway operations to Citra Marga Nusaphala Persada Corp. is expected to displace nearly a thousand workers.

Around 100 members of the PSC employees union occupied all northbound lanes of the Skyway and marched from the Bicutan exit to the Pitchels interchange in Pasay City.

"We received a notice of retrenchment on Friday. Only then did the new management inform the labor department of the massive layoffs," said Rene Inciong, president of the Skyway Patrol Union.

Inciong estimated that the affected workers would be around 600, including company guards, toll collectors, yard-and-file office workers, Skyway patrol units, maintenance workers and drivers. Also affected are some 200 contractual employees.

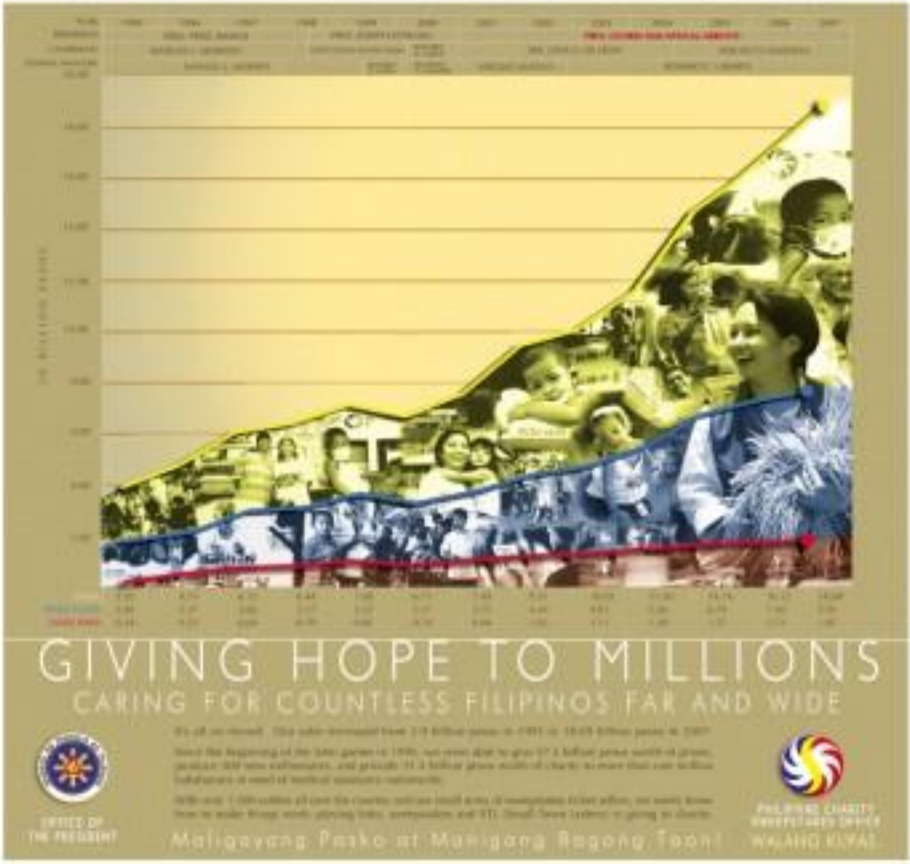
The protest was supported by the Confederation for the Unity, Recognition and Advancement of Government Workers (Courage).

Courage said nationwide actions were planned this January in defense of the employees' jobs and security of tenure.

The Partido ng Manggagawa (PM) also expressed its support for the PSCC workers. PM chair Renato Magtubo said the Skyway was a "battle against management's scheme to bust the union of PSCC to enlist so-cheapest the rest of labor and raise profits of the company."

Willy Ca, president of the government-owned PSCC Skyway Corp., however, said the Skyway system could no longer address the protest action since it had

COMMUTERS and motorists were caught up in traffic as workers block the road early yesterday in protest against the Skyway takeover.



₱.5M worth of 'crackers seized from Manila vendors

By Karaline L. Rivera and Tina G. Santos

THE MANILA POLICE DISTRICT has confiscated almost a ton—dried home or P500,000 worth of firecrackers from vendors in Divisoria, Tondo and Binondo during a series of raids.

In the Eastern Police District (EPD), about 900 dangerous firecrackers from various sellers were confiscated.

The raids were in compliance with the National Capital Region Police Office's Dec. 27 directive to confiscate prohibited pyrotechnics to reduce injuries on New Year's Eve.

Police said the firecrackers were confiscated because they were illegal or sold without the necessary permits.

In Manila the items seized include pla-pla, kwitis, bawang and baby rocket. Policemen also confiscated a number of picolo firecrackers as well as huge PVC pipes (canon) from several residents.

In Brgy. 286 in dela Cruz, chief of the EPD, said the seized firecrackers in his district included large pla-pla, Judas bell, and atwe.

Also seized in the operations were 191 packs of bawang, 140 packs of five star, 109 pieces of whistle bomb, 5 boxes of canister and 200 boxes of picolo, as well as homemade cannon or luga.

The crackdown on the sale of firecrackers was also in keeping with the health department's campaign to reduce injuries from firecracker explosions on New Year's Eve, traditionally celebrated by Filipinos with noise-making and fireworks.

The health department also warned against the use of aerosol, as it had poisonous ingredients.

Dela Cruz urged people to stay sober if they planned to have fireworks. Drinks, apart from children, are the usual firecracker casualties, he said.

In the EPD, the cities of Pasig and Marikina have prohibited the use and sale of large, illegal firecrackers. Marikina scheduled a five-point fireworks show instead.

The Philippine National Police had banned the use of luga among holiday merrymakers because it had caused a number of injuries in the past.

The DOH, meanwhile, said the picolo, while seemingly harmless, caused the most number of firecracker-related injuries, particularly among children.

It was popular with kids because it was sold at only ₱1.6 a pack, the department added.

A POLICEMAN inspects confiscated improvised firecracker, more popularly known as "luga," at the Manila Police District Headquarters on Uli Avenue.

Makati feels good about 2008 despite setbacks – Binay

By DJ Yap

MAKATI MAYOR JEJOMAR BINAY paid tribute to the resilience of his constituents as the city prepared to welcome 2008 with a fireworks display.

A New Year countdown will be held on the Peninsula Manila.

"The people of Makati are very resilient. There's every reason to feel good about the New Year," Binay said in an interview Sunday.

The country's financial capital found itself in the center of controversy during the last quarter of 2007 following the Glorietta 2 blast on Oct. 19 that killed 11 persons and the takeover of the Peninsula hotel by a group of junior military officers on Nov. 29.

It was also to Makati where a traffic accident seriously injured former Sen. Rene Saguisag and his driver Felipe Calvelo and killed his wife Dolor.

Binay said the mood in the central business district remained happy and hopeful despite the setbacks.

He said city residents had gotten used to human developments.

"There was Oakwood, a number! And earlier, there was Intersec," he said, referring to two previous coup attempts staged in the city.

In 2003, a group of junior officers belonging to the Magdalo group barricaded themselves for several hours in the Oakwood serviced apartments in the Ayala Center.

In the late 1980s, the Reed Intercontinental was occupied by military officers led by now Sen. Gregorio Honasan in a failed attempt to grab power from the administration of then President Corazon Aquino.

Binay said such events had not diminished the prestige of living or working in Makati.

"In fact, these events only made Makati more famous," he said.

Koreans nabbed for illegal lottery, maltreatment of women workers

By DJ Yap

FOUR KOREAN COMPUTER program managers were arrested in midnight Sunday for illegally operating without proper permits an online lottery in a Makati City office and maltreating their women employees.

Arrested were Oh Hyung Il, 27; Nam Sang Kyung, 30; Lee Sung Hee, 29; and Han Chang Young, 39, all residents of 916 Jeronimo St., Ayala Alabang Village, Muntinlupa City.

A report by PO3 Joseph Bulilan said eight women employees complained about the alleged maltreatment by their employers.

They identified the managers of the alleged illegal gambling operation as a certain "Mr. Rocha," who they said, was also a Korean national.

A team of Makati policemen from the Station Investigation and Detective Management Branch went to the suspects' office on the 28th floor of the Rockwell Corporate Tower on Gil Puyat Avenue to verify the complaints, the police said.

"Suspects failed to show any documents, thus prompting the group to apprehend and confiscate their paraphernalia such as computers, keno machines (numbers), and lottery balls," Bulilan said.

The police said the four Koreans would be charged with illegal recruitment, serial defamation and illegal gambling.

MetroBriefs

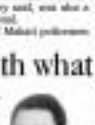
Man charged for posing as NBI agent

CHARGES have been filed against a man who allegedly posed as an agent of the National Bureau of Investigation, according to authorities. Emilio Santos, of Maryore Homes, Imus, Cavite, is now facing charges of usurpation of authority, illegal use of uniform or insignia and falsification by public individuals and use of falsified documents in the Manila Prosecutor's Office. Ricardo de Guzman III, chief of the NBI Anti-Computer Crimes Division, said that while NBI Director Nestor Mantaring and his escorts were on their way to Quezon City, they chanced upon the suspect on board a motorcycle and wearing a windshirt with the words "NBI Anti-Organized Crime Division." One security escort flagged down the suspect at Commonwealth corner Forbes Street in Sampaloc and asked if he was an employee of the NBI. Asked to produce his identification card, Santos allegedly presented a counterfeit NBI ID and a badge. This prompted the NBI personnel division and Office of the Director to request the Santos man neither an NBI employee nor a legitimate consultant of the bureau. Also seized from the suspect were several other fake IDs, including an AFP Enlisted Personnel Reservist ID. Ellen C. Zarate

Taxi cab stolen by car thieves in Quezon City

TWO WOMEN and a man, posing as passengers, held up a driver and stole the cab before dawn yesterday in Quezon City. Roy Cristobal, driver of an AMZ taxi cab with plate number TBK – 730, said the cab and ₱3,000 after his cab was taken by the suspects at around 4:30 a.m. yesterday at the corner of Betty Go Belmonte Street and Mangahan Road, Barangay Kaunlaran in New Manila. A Quezon City Police District report revealed that Cristobal picked up his three passengers somewhere in Manila and was told to drive to Quezon City. However upon reaching Betty Go Belmonte Street, the trio—armed with knives and a pistol—announced a holdup. The suspects commanded him to the side and drove towards the direction of Aurora Boulevard, leaving behind the hapless victim. Quezon City police have launched follow-up operations for the recovery of the cab. Jeannette Andrade

Be careful with what you say



ON TARGET
Ramon Tulfo

TO ALL READERS: THANK YOU very much for making this column No. 2 on the list of the 10 Most Read Columns in the Inquirer in 2007.

Hollywood by Dolly Anne Carvajal was No. 1.

I will continue to keep the faith. I promise to continue to do never you wrong.

* * *

When I read the front page story in this paper yesterday I cried out of sheer joy.

All the hardships I've been through in the past two years—as a result of the harassment in the form of libel and other cases filed against me—have been compensated.

I will treasure the news item headlined "Tollhouse-raper wins acquittal on court road stories, Dollywood No. 1 column," like the Purple Heart medal and as a badge of honor.

* * *

Items in this space that would harm other people's reputation were thought over many times before they saw print.

I may not be religious, but I believe in the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

I am also a firm believer in karma, the universal law of cause and effect, whatever you do to your fellowmen comes back to you.

I consider this column a great responsibility.

* * *

If you want your life to improve this year, watch what comes out of your mouth.

Your words are very powerful because they are the products of your thinking, of your subconscious.

If things are not going well, instead of saying, "My life is miserable, I can't make both ends meet," why not say "I know that things will turn out for the better."

The reason this country does not move forward is the powerty consciousness among the majority of its people.

It's way common to hear people, especially the poor, say, "Ang hirap ng buhay, wala na tayong pagkakaguluhan (Life is hard, we'll not get anywhere)."

Remember Manuel L. Quezon's famous words: "I would rather have this country ruin like hell by Filipinos rather than like heaven by the Americans."

Those were very powerful words because Quezon got what he wished for. Look at the country now.

During the time of President Ramon, the country became an economic tiger.

Why? Because FVR kept saying, "Kaya natin 'to (We can do it)" with his right thumb up.

Ramos' successor, actor Joseph "Erap" Estrada became famous for his song, "Alagain" or whatever the title of that song is. Alagain means "to endure hardship."

Erap was clearly addressing his poor constituency instead of encouraging the poor to think positive. Erap was telling them to continue to just submit to poverty because there's no hope in suffering.

If you continue to say that you are rich even if at the moment you are short on cash, you invite wealth into your life.

You seldom catch a Chinese Filipino say he doesn't have money. He tells you he is money is running even if his pocket is empty at the moment.

And once enough, he amasses wealth. You seldom meet a poor Chinoy.

* * *

Did you see a policeman or a military man this his gun on New Year's Eve?

If you did, call "Imeldang wa kay Tulfo" hotline at 0921-2396-AKO or (02)7-636-2-HAK or text headline at 920-57-82. Your identity will be held in strict confidence.

My staff and I will send your report directly to Director General Avelino Razon, chief of the Philippine National Police.

Razon told me yesterday he would give priority to complaints against cops and soldiers who use their gun to celebrate the arrival of 2008.

He said he would have cops undergo a fast hearing, and if they're found guilty they would be dismissed outright.

As for military personnel, Razon said he would give the report to his military counterpart, General Hermo Esperon.

For comments, please write to tuliferman@inquirer.com.ph

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- Pay with for particular?
- Fed up with crowing and noisy neighbors?
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- Daughter/neighbor from or your way to work?
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P.S.
Inquirer

Workers close Skyway...

from page B2

graciously compensated retrenched employees.

"The entire management and staff will be replaced by tomorrow. The new toll operator is probably in a better position to decide what to do with these (striking workers)," Go added.

The protesters began their march at around 8 a.m. and finished the way of motorists bound for Manila. Last September, workers of the Philippine National Construction Corp. also protested Cora's takeover, saying the move meant they would lose their jobs.

The 13-year-old PSC, a subsidiary of the PNCC, an attached agency of the Department of Public Works and Highways, operates the Skyway.

Earlier, Apollo Ayla, president of the PSC employees union, said an provision was made for the retention of the existing workforce by the new management.

Cora will reportedly hire new people.

"What we want is for them to compensate us for our services," he said. "We are willing to be rehired even at a minimum wage," Soriano said, adding that with the Cora takeover, the Skyway toll would increase by more than 300 percent.

An extended Supplemental Toll Operations Agreement allows Cora to increase toll rates on an annual basis, as well as to make adjustments based on peso-dollar fluctuations, Soriano said.

Go said the company paid each retrenched worker 150 percent of salary for every year of service, plus gratuity. The legal requirement was only about 100-125 percent, he said.

Go added that the decision to privatize Skyway toll operations was made by the parent company, PNCC.

PASIG CITY MEDICAL MISSION
The Philippine Chinese Charitable Association Inc., which owns and operates the Chinese General Hospital and Medical Center, represented by its chairman of the board and president Dr. James Dy in cooperation with the Filipino-Chinese General Chamber of Commerce Inc. and the Philippine National Red Cross gave free medical and dental services at Stella Maris, Barangay Maybunga, Pasig City, in coordination with Pasig City Rep. Roman Romulo. In photo are Rep. Romulo, Vice Dy, Gloria Yang and the CGHMC staff.

HOLIDAY TREAT

Marikina residents watch a fireworks display at the city's Riverbanks area yesterday evening.

DID YOU KNOW

Feb. 19-27 Nov.Day was held on Dec. 30, 1896 after Emilio Aguinaldo, then head of the revolutionary government, declared it a day of national mourning to commemorate the execution of Dr. Jose Rizal two years earlier. The decree, signed on Dec. 30, 1896, also stated that Rizal's birthday, June 19, would be a holiday.

Zyrex, Amalayric improve financial

EASTWOOD CINEMAS

RICHARD POON

Eastwood City

Recruiter gets life sentence, ₱5M fine

By Julie M. Aurelio

A WOMAN was sentenced to life imprisonment for illegal recruitment and three counts of rape.

Judge Helen Corales of the Pasay City Regional Trial Court Branch 118 also ordered Gisela Lapsa to pay a fine of P500,000 for illegal recruitment.

For the three counts of rape, Lapsa was sentenced to a minimum of four years in prison and was ordered to pay her victims P450,000 in damages.

Corales ordered that the case be archived, as Lapsa's associate Teodora Pena remained at large.

The court was told that Lapsa recruited in 2006 three people for well-paying jobs as drivers and maids in Italy.

In his decision, Corales gave more weight to the testimonies of Lavella Orbeada, Eric Manlapaz and Steven Delaza, who said they were duped by Lapsa from May to October 2006.

The complainants said Lapsa met them at a Pasay City commercial center and demanded a placement fee of P50,000 from Orbeada and P400,000 each from the other victims.

The complainants were promised jobs as helpers or drivers in Italy and were assured they would get all the necessary documents.

Court records showed Lapsa did not issue receipts for the payments but, when the job applicants checked with the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, they found out that Lapsa was not an authorized recruiter.

Lapsa denied the charges, saying she had not even spoken to the complainants about overseas jobs.

She said she was in a hospital May 4-6, 2006 and could not have met Manlapaz, who claimed to have paid her P400,000 on May 6.

Corales said Lapsa's denial could not "stand alone in the absence of any corroborating evidence."

Wishing you every happiness this

HOLIDAY SEASON

& throughout the coming

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- 30 KBP Golden Dove Awards
- 29 Star Awards for Television
- 10 Catholic Mass Media Awards
- 1 Rotary Club of Manila
- 1 Asia Pacific PR Award
- 6 Philippine Quill Awards
- 6 Asian Television Awards
- 1 Seoul Drama Award

3 Best TV Station of the Year

Asian TV Awards
KBP Golden Dove Awards
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A First in Philippine Broadcasting History

International Emmy Awards

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BANDILA

2 Best AM Radio Station of the Year

KBP Golden Dove Awards
Rotary Club of Manila

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2007 was deadliest year for US troops in Iraq

BAGHDAD— THE SECOND HALF OF 2007 saw violence drop dramatically in Iraq, but the program came at a high price: The year was the deadliest for the US military since the 2003 invasion, with 899 troops killed.

American commanders and diplomats, however, say the battlefield gains against insurgents such as al-Qaida in Iraq offer only a partial picture of where the country stands as the war moves toward its fifth year and a withdrawal.

Two critical shifts that boosted U.S.-led forces in 2007 — a still-imposed ceasefire by a mass Shiite militia and a grass-roots revolt by Sunni tribesmen against al-Qaida fighters, including reservists needed for deadly sandwich bombs.

But Iran's apparent hands-off policies could stoke unrest in Shiite factions — some favoring Iran, others not — battle for control of Iraq's oil south.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, still is overseeing a look to the uneven Iraqi security forces to carry the load in 2008 as demands for an American exit strategy grow sharper during the US presidential election year.

Those factors make the US coalition part are in Iraq, is gradually drawing down its forces and other allies, including Poland and Australia, are contemplating full-scale withdrawals in the coming year.

[T]hey're focusing our energy on helping our other coalition and Iraqi troops have accomplished in 2007," Gen. David Petraeus told a group of Pentagon journalists on Saturday. "Success will not, however, be akin to flipping on a light switch. It will emerge slowly and fitfully, with reverses as well as setbacks, accumulating, hopefully, over days and gradually more good days."

That set of progress played out in the two darkest-red US and Iraqi casualties.

American military deaths peaked in May with 126 troops killed. It was then that the US began ramping up its attacks against insurgent strongholds, leading to increased clashes in Baghdad and other key areas across central Iraq.

Seven months on, commanders and analysts say America's aggressive and stubborn say America's aggressive strategy of targeting al-Qaida in Iraq strongholds is paying off. US casualties have declined sharply since then. The day night in Baghdad, 23 deaths were reported in December, one more than in February 2004, which was the lowest monthly total of the war.

The 899 deaths in 2007 surpassed the previously highest death toll in 2004, when 849 US soldiers were killed. The total for 2007 would rise slightly were recently the military reports new casualties a few days after they occur. The military reported the non-combat related death of a soldier on Sunday.

At least 3,902 members of the US military have died since the beginning of the war. Of those, at least 1,175 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

Iraqi civilian deaths have tracked that decline and overall violence across the country a down roughly 60 percent. American commanders say.

Since the influx of some 30,000 US troops that began in June, the Iranian-ing violence has meant that new problems have emerged.

"There certainly are ample challenges out there in the new year. In some respects, the positive developments in the latter half of 2007 also have created the challenges of 2008," US Ambassador Ryan Crocker said during a recent briefing.

An example, Crocker said, is how the improving security situation is paving the way back Iraqis who took refuge in neighboring Syria, Jordan and elsewhere.

"The return of refugees ... a good thing obviously, but a process is going to have to be carefully managed so that it doesn't raise the seeds of new tensions and instability," he said.

Along with the increase in American troops, Iraq's festering violence has been attributed to a self-imposed freeze on activities by the Mahdi Army militia of radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Another important change was the quick growth of mostly Sunni anti-al-Qaida in Iraq groups, or "awakening councils," who cross fought against US and Iraqi forces but now point their guns toward the insurgents.

Of the more than 70,000 fighters in the awakening councils, only 20 percent are expected to be absorbed into the Iraqi security forces. The rest are to receive job training through a joint $300 million-to-$400 million program Iraqi and American officials are creating. AP

SOLDIERS from the Delta Company of the 187th Mountain Division rest after searching for three of their comrades missing after a during May 12 attack that left four US soldiers and an Iraqi soldier dead in a village south of Baghdad. AP

For street cleaners, scraps include human flesh

BAGHDAD— IT MUST BE A CANDIDATE for the worst job in Iraq.

It falls to Baghdad's street sweepers to pick up the fingertips and scraps of flesh left behind after the emergency workers haul away the torsos and heads of bombing victims. They do the job without gloves, in all but the coldest weeks of winter.

If the attack comes while they are off duty, they are roughly $8 extra for cleaning up. Despite the grisly work and the outbursts at the deaths, that is a welcome raise when they are each paid about $6 a day. There were many such bomb bonuses paid in 2007, though markedly fewer than in past years.

But on Sunday, as year's end, two municipal street cleaners, Imad al-Hashimi and Laith Shehab Latif, said the bonuses would be something they would happily live without in 2008.

They were outside the Hayder ice cream shop in early August, where at least 10 people were killed at one of central Baghdad's most popular refreshment spots in the Karrada district, outside the inconspicuous entrance to the cluttered Mrs. Ahmed ice cream factory. Mrs. Ahmed and the market where more than a dozen people were blown up on Dec. 5. Across town, their colleagues had to clear up Ghazil animal market last month, said Tayeman Jaseem had Friday. Barring huge oil debris into a battered white Izuzu truck after a car bomber killed eight people.

"Things have got better over the last few months, maybe 70 percent, and God willing, they will be better again next year," Hashimi said. "Although we get a 10,000 dinar bonus" — about $8 — "for each body part we remove, we don't want to see this. They are Iraqis, friend, this or Christian, they are all Iraqis."

Glossing the two cleaners, whose hands look like those of men twice their 40 years or so, outside that it is not much of a job, but it is at least employment in a country where that is scarce.

AFP

1/3 of Palestinians killed by Israel in '07 were civilians

JERUSALEM—HOME THAN ONE-third of the Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in 2007 were civilians who were not involved in hostilities, an Israeli human rights group said in a report released on Monday.

"In 2007, about 33 percent of those killed were civilians who were not taking part in the hostilities when killed," said the report by the B'Tselem organization.

Out of the 373 Palestinians killed, 121, or some 33 percent, were civilians who were not involved in fighting, the report said — a decrease of 19 percentage points from the 2006 figure of 52 percent.

The number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in 2007 nearly halved compared to the previous year — 373 died up to Dec. 29 this year, while 657 were killed in 2006, it said.

The majority of the Palestinians who died by Israeli fire in 2007 were killed in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas — an Islamist movement pledged to Israel's destruction — violently seized power in June.

Since then, Israel has launched regular air and ground operations in the territory populated by 1.5 million people aimed at stopping the near-daily firing of rockets and mortars from the territory.

An Israeli army spokesperson said she could not immediately comment on the report because the army had not yet received a copy of it.

The report also said that 2007 saw a "deterioration in many other measures of the human rights situation in the occupied territories. The primary one is the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which has declined to an all time low, following Israel's tighten on the area."

Following Hamas's takeover of power, Israel in September declared Gaza a "hostile entity," signing even tighter on the movement of goods and people in the impoverished territory.

On the Israeli side, seven civilians were killed this year by militants, three of them in a suicide bombing attack in the Red Sea resort town of Eilat in January, two in rocket attacks on the town of Sderot near Gaza, and two by gunfire in the occupied West Bank. AFP

Poll result plunges Kenya into turmoil

NAIROBI— IT TOOK ALL OF ABOUT 12 minutes on Sunday after Kenya's president was declared the winner of a deeply controversial election, for the country to explode.

Thousands of young men burst out of Eldoret, a shantytown of 1 million people, waving sticks, standing sharks, burning tires and hurling stones. Gel cans poured into the streets to fight those who supported Mwai Kibaki, the incumbent, gangs went house to house, dragging out people of certain tribes and clubbing them to death.

"It's war," said Hudson Chare, a taxi driver in Nairobi. "Tribal war."

Early violence was a reaction of the most heavily fought election in Kenya's history has pitched the country into chaos. The opposition rejected the results and vowed to inaugurate its leader, Raila Odinga, as "the people's president," which the government warned would be unanimous to coup. As the riots spread, the government took the first steps toward martial law on Sunday night and banned all live media broadcasts.

Western diplomats said that Kenya's election commission ignored months of evidence of vote rigging to keep the government in power. Now, one of the most developed, stable nations in Africa, which has a powerhouse economy with a billion-dollar tourism industry, has plunged into intense uncertainty, fueling its doom as an exemplary democracy and quickly descending into tribal bloodletting.

With the president, Mwai Kibaki a Kikuyu, and Odinga a Luo, the election was largely seen as a referendum on the ascendancy of tribal tensions that always lay beneath the surface in Kenya but up until now had not provoked widespread mayhem. In Mathare, a slum in Nairobi, Luo gangs burned more than 500 Kikuyu houses. In Kisumu, a Kikuyu mob was headed their belongings in vans and fled. Almost all the businesses in the country are shut. The only figures in downtown Nairobi, the capital, which is usually choked with traffic, are battered soldiers in bullet-ball helmet plastic shields. Only black clouds of smoke rising from the slums on treetops evening, emerging out the east. At least 13 people have been killed, but with the news media blackout, it is difficult determining what is happening. NYT

Dozens hurt in Thai bombings

A THAI Muslim student dressed as Santa Claus celebrates the end of the year in Thailand's southern southern Yala province, Dec. 31. AP

HAAT YAI, THAILAND— FIVE bombs planted by suspected separatist rebels rocked Thailand's troubled south early Monday, injuring dozens of people in a town on the Malaysian border, police said.

Explosives planted at entertainment venues across Haat Yai, Songkhla town in Narathiwat province wounded 27 people, two of them seriously, police said.

"It was likely done by militant-who target innocent people during new year," local police chief Col. Prakphan Meesangphetch said. AFP

He said police managed to defuse one bomb as it found in the Muslim-majority region, where rebels are waging a bloody battle for a separate state, but five devices struck two office boards nearby.

The first blasts hit at about 00:40 am Monday (1740 GMT Sunday), sending people fleeing into a hotel car park, where another bomb was hidden.

A police officer in Narathiwat said that explosives had been packed into cigarette packets, which were planted inside a hotel clinic.

Another blast hit a hotel karaoke bar, he said. AFP

Frustration grows as Colombia hostage release put off once more

VILLAVICENCIO, COLOMBIA— WHILE hostages held for years in Colombian by Marxist guerrillas will not be handed to a Venezuelan chopper team until at least Monday but officials said they were in constant contact with the rebels.

The powerful Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, promised two weeks ago to free two former Colombian politicians and the young son born to one of them in captivity but have not yet revealed their whereabouts.

"We don't have the time to wait and finish the operation today," a senior government official said from the town of Villavicencio, where Venezuelan helicopters are waiting to be dispatched to pick up the captives.

The Marxist FARC negotiated the hostage release with neighboring Venezuela's leftist President Hugo Chavez, who expressed worries the hair-chase will fail if it does not happen soon.

"If this were to drag on three or four more days, for security reasons, it could collapse until we would have to think of something else," Chavez said late on Saturday.

Efforts involved in planning the handover until Chavez was still time for the FARC to say where it was keeping Clara Rojas, Consuelo Gonzalez, Clara Rojas and her son Emmanuel, who was fathered by a guerrilla fighter and is thought to be 4 years old.

But even the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is helping coordinate the mission, showed clear-ing signs of frustration as it called on the FARC to cooperate.

"This is an exclusively humanitarian aid ... for the FARC to divulge the coordinates as soon as possible," Barbara Hintermann, head of the Red Cross in Colombia, told reporters.

The FARC uses kidnapping as a weapon in a guerrilla war it has been waging against the Colombian state since the 1960s.

Colombia's conservative government is wary of Chavez and his dream of uniting South America through socialism but has let him fly Venezuelan aircraft under the auspices of the Red Cross deep into its territory to collect the hostages.

Colombia's ex-rebel allies the Venezuelans and the Red Cross the time needed to complete the mission.

Venezuela's foreign minister said on Sunday the government was in constant communication with the guerrillas but did not say what was stalling the operation.

Foreign envoys flew to the central Colombian town of Villavicencio on Saturday to observe the mission. Among them were former Argentine President Senator Kirchner, officials from France and Switzerland and UN Rio director Oliver Stern, who is making a determination about Latin America.

Villavicencio is a gateway to southern jungles where the FARC controls wide areas used to produce the cocaine that funds its insurgency. The group is holding more than 700 hostages for ransom and political leverage. Reuters

The WORLD

Elinor Lenarne B. Gusco

US stuck with Musharraf, say White House hopefuls

WASHINGTON—TOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES said Sunday the United States was stuck for now with Pakistan's unpopular President Pervez Musharraf at a time of boiling unrest in the nuclear-armed US ally.

But Democratic and Republican runners raised the US administration should call for pressing Musharraf to resolve unclear security crisis, and free elections, following last week's assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

"I'm not calling for him to step down," Democrat Hillary Clinton told NBC television, as Bhutto's murder revived debate about candidates' foreign policy credentials just before Iowa kicks-off the 2008 White House race on Thursday.

"I'm calling for him, number one, to agree with an independent investigation of Benazir Bhutto's death. I am calling on him to hold free and fair elections with independent monitors," the senator and former first lady said.

Clinton's interview was taped before Bhutto's 19-year-old son Bilawal was chosen Sunday to succeed the mantle of her party, which said it would take part in elections on Jan. 8 despite unrest triggered by the assassination.

Clinton claimed: "This is an opportunity for President Musharraf to step up and actually fulfill many of the words and promises that he's made to me and to many others over the course of a number of years." Democratic challenger Barack Obama decried making political hay out of Bhutto's murder, after arguing that Clinton's vote in 2002 for the Iraq war had violated caution in Pakistan by destructing US attention from Afghanistan.

"What I do believe is that if we are going to take seriously the problem of Islamic terrorism, and the stability of Pakistan, then we have to look at it in a wider context," he said on NBC.

Obama said the US administration's hefty financial support for its "war on terror" ally should not translate into a "blank check" for Musharraf, and urged the Pakistani leader to end a state of emergency through open elections.

Democratic frontrunner John Edwards told the CBS network he had spoken to Musharraf after Bhutto's killing and had assured that "democratization in Pakistan must continue." "He assured me that it would. That has to be taken with a huge grain of salt, given his history," Edwards said.

Republican hopeful John McCain, a Vietnam war hero and foreign policy veteran, said Musharraf was "important" to Pakistan's future and echoed Clinton in asking "who will take his place?" Senator McCain said he was "disappointed" that leaders Musharraf, party of northwest Pakistan had "refused to join forces for Indians." But the president says still "play a key and pivotal role" in moving Pakistan back towards democracy, he said on NBC.

Senate foreign relations committee chairman Joseph Biden told CNN he had no confidence in Musharraf, and insisted that President George W. Bush should reorient US policy away from the general turned politician. AFP

DEMOCRATIC presidential hopeful and New York Senator Hillary Clinton reacts to a supporter at a dor campaign with daughter Chelsea Clinton (left) Dec. 28 in Marion, Iowa. AP

For presidential contenders, Iowa's electoral math hides key to victory

DES MOINES, IOWA—INTRICATE electoral horse-trading and massive voter attendance drives look set to decide the two close-to-call Iowa caucuses, Thursday's first nominating showdown of the 2008 White House race.

With polls showing an agonizingly tight contest between Hillary Clinton and her Democratic rivals and also among Republicans, the quirky statewide caucuses on Thursday could

A WOMAN pushes a cart on a snow-covered road in North Jeolla province, 240 km south of Seoul, Dec. 31. AFP

'Perfect storm' of clichés makes bad English list

CHICAGO—A "PERFECT" OF overused words and phrases formed a "perfect storm" of "over-9/11" clichés in 2007, according to a US university's annual list of words and phrases to give dowers to be banned.

Choosing from among 2,000 submissions, the public relations department at Michigan's Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie targeted 18 offenses to the English language.

The contributors gave first prize to the phrase "a perfect storm," saying it was mostly truly applied to eternally empty newsdesk coincidences.

"Perfect storm" (the list as a drowsome uses stood combining Web and seeming than a contributor said "belongs in the same school of incoherent thought that brought us e-anything and i-anything." Similarly, the list-makers complained about the absurd conjunctional community phrased "it is the new y," as in "Angel 70 is the new 007" or "chocolate is the new sex."

Some words and phrases trapped under the weight of overuse, overabuse and, stinging the application of "organic" in everything from computer software to dog food.

In the same vein, "incentivize" (meaning to add "perk" with a touch of color (and new words, the list-makers said.

Such phrases as "post 9/11" and "surge" have become cliché. Their usefulness, they said. Surge emerged in reference to adding US troops to Iraq but has come to explain the expansion of anything. Reuters

Security lapse, her personal touch made Bhutto vulnerable to attack

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN—LAX security allowed an assassin to approach within feet of Benazir Bhutto but the popular politician's decision to open a hatch in her bombproof vehicle and clutch with jubilant supporters ultimately caused her demise.

Bhutto, who died Thursday in a gun and suicide bomb attack, revelled in personal campaigning and shrewdly engaging her supporters, traits that fueled her popularity among many of Pakistan's desperate poor, but also posed a challenge for the security forces assigned to protect her.

"She was a very brave lady and sometimes when you see the supporters and cheering crowds there is a tendency not to bend the security department, and that's exactly what happened, unfortunately," Interior Ministry spokesman Javed Iqbal Cheema said Sunday.

Four before Bhutto returned to Pakistan in October from eight years in exile, she was warned suicide squads were targeting her. At her homecoming parade in Karachi, twin bombers struck her convoy, killing about 150 people, some of them the police assigned to protect her.

She complained bitterly in several emails that her life remained in danger and that the government of President Pervez Musharraf, was not giving her the proper protection.

In an October e-mail that an associate forwarded to CNN's Paula Zahn and U.S. Rep. Steve Israel, she said specific security improvements she had requested were ignored. "I have been made to feel insecure by his (Musharraf's) statement," she said.

Bhutto, who was leading her party into parliamentary elections, had blamed elements in the ruling party for the threats against her. The government said al-Qaida-linked militants orchestrated her killing. Thursday, a claim both the militants and Bhutto's aides rejected.

The security around Bhutto was tremendous: a reporter was able to walk into a recent rally in Hawab Shah in her southern Sindh province last week without being frisked or passing through a metal detector. Her supporters pressed up to the stage, just feet from where she was speaking.

"The government has never provided appropriate security to Benazir Bhutto," said Aghaeig Durrani, a senior official in Bhutto's party. Many Bhutto aides questioned how the gunwoman was able to penetrate the perimeter and other targeted government officials, but not the popular opposition leader.

Bhutto herself took risks. She declined to wear a bulletproof vest, and during her 18-hour, close-security procession through the streets of Karachi on Oct. 18, she refused to use a bulletproof glass cubicle that had been built atop her truck, standing instead atop a rolling to greet the massive crowds. AP

S. Korea pardons Daewoo founder

SEOUL—THE FOUNDER OF SOUTH Korea's Daewoo Group, who had been given a lengthy jail term for his role in one of the world's largest corporate failures, was pardoned Monday under a traditional New Year amnesty.

Kim Woo-Choong, 71, founder and former chairman of the once-vibrant group, was one of 75 people to benefit from the presidential amnesty, the justice ministry said in a statement.

Several chiefs of the nation's huge conglomerates known as "chaebol" were sentenced to prison terms in the years following the 1997 financial crisis. But most were either pardoned or had their sentences commuted on appeal.

Daewoo had debts of $82 billion when it went under in 1999 in the wake of the financial crisis. The government was forced to spend some 30 trillion won (now $32 billion) to rescue its component companies.

Kim fled the country in the suspicion indictment unfolded he was accused of ordering his executives to inflate the group's assets between 1997 and 1998 to obtain bank loans.

After returning from exile in 2005, Kim was convicted of masterminding an accounting fraud involving 29 trillion won and borrowing 9.6 trillion won in illegal loans from banks as well as smuggling funds overseas.

In November 2006 an appeal court fined his jail term at eight and a half years and he was ordered to forfeit 17.9 trillion won and pay 10 trillion won in fines. But one month after that ruling, a local court ordered a suspension of the jail sentence on grounds of ill health.

Also pardoned Monday was Chung Mong-Koo, chairman of Hyundai Engineering and Construction, who was convicted of embezzlement.

In September an appeal court quashed a three-year prison sentence imposed on Hyundai Automotive Group chairman Chung Mong-Hoo for causing a multi-million dollar slush fund.

A proposed suspended sentence, on the grounds that Chung's contribution would badly damage the economy.

Also in September Shinsegae Group chairman Kim Seung-Youn, who had been ordered jailed for a gangland-style revenge attack, was freed by an appeals court which suspended his sentence.

Businessman-to-death row but their sentences commuted to life imprisonment under Monday's special presidential decree, the justice ministry said.

The country has imposed a moratorium on executions since the last hangings in Dec. 20, 1997. AFP

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WHAT'S INSIDE
■ Inquirer Sports' top choices for 2007 /A31

SPORTS

Editor Toddyboy S. Melendrez Assistant Editor Francis B.J. Gatbonton
Tell us your hotshots: inquirer.sports@gmail.com; text message to 2330

Never-say-die spirit keeps Harbour afloat

Batang Pier set up PBL dynasty

By Jaccinto W. Jugo

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HARD FOR ANY TEAM TO STAY POSITIVE WHILE staring at a 19-point deficit heading into the closing minutes of a championship showdown.

But Harbour Centre did so anyway.

The powerhouse squad feared, after all, that it had already established a PBL dynasty built on character and chemistry.

"How many times have we been down? Countless, it's really a never-say-die team," said Finals Most Valuable Player (FV) Yeng. "We don't want to be the fourth Harbour Centre team who just gave up. We just wanted to keep on coming back."

And only the Batang Pier did as they pulled off one of the most unbelievable comebacks in league history to post a 94-87 overtime triumph against the favored Hapee squad and capture a record fourth straight championship.

Never giving up

"I just told them never to give up," said coach Jorge Gallent, the strategist behind all four triumphs. "I can't say anything more about the heart of these players."

Solomon Mercado also applied Batang Pier's resolve as the Fil-Am guard delivered 14 points in the last eight minutes of play, last three clips after bungling two one-and-one throws in their Game 1 loss.

"I knew I had to redeem myself and bounce back," said Mercado, who bagged the Pivotal Player plum. "Credited it as a blessing. I missed it, so it can only make me strong. It feels good to redeem myself."

"It was a struggle for us," added Yeng. "But it was really brave and pride. You have to dig deep inside yourself to finish the game."

The match turned out to be such a thriller that Harbour Centre owner Mikee Romero hyperventilated after the game and was rushed to Makati Medical Center.

"Up to now, I don't know how we won the game; it was almost impossible," said Romero.

"Perhaps my contribution to the team is I reminded them all the time we having fatigue (never give up). Up to the last one second, we have to fight. The legacy of Harbour is in type of play. We bring the seven-up the attitude you see, you see."

Talk of five straight

So it came as no surprise, too, when some of them eluded the inevitable talk of capturing five straight championships.

"Next conference, we're going for that number five," declared Gallent, who will parade an even more formidable lineup with the return of several national team teammates, led by Jason Castro and Beau Belga, following a golden run in the 24th Southeast Asian Games.

"If you are already credited in the hospital after a five-peat, I might not get out of the hospital in a five-peat," Romero said in jest.

"The character of Harbour suggests palmarosity goes outside (that). They're willing to do just to win). The game that matters most, they win it all the time in the last three minutes."

"The first championship against Toyota was so hard in this, but this is no mention of championship. It's a romantic championship for us. It's the best way to do a five-peat. Nothing beats what they did. The players deserve everything."

HARBOUR Centre's Rico Maierhofer tries to shake off Hapee's Gabe Norwood in Game 3 of Sunday's PBL Finals.

'Twas also a year of big misses, incredible flops

By Erick A. Gonzales

THERE WERE BIG MISSES AND A FEW heels among the major hits and heroes who dominated the sports scene last year.

Football produced two heartbreaking tales that saw Hapee Toothpaste and University of the East end up to the depths of despair after running as close to claiming famous championships in their respective leagues.

Billiards recorded a rare heroics for inner TV-Solaire boy Efren Reyes de Bata-an as he came from behind to win a nail-biting finish in the finals of the World Pool Championship before his eventual last November.

While Manny Pacquiao remained the country's top boxing icon and four-sides hardworking fighters led by IBF flyweight champion Nonito Donaire claimed lightweight world titles, the boxing scene was a mixture of promising fare. "Boom Boom" Bautista by Daniel Ponce De Leon of Mexico in the World Cup of Boxing and remained in the minds of boxing fans.

But the biggest flop of them all was the Philippine contingent to the Southeast Asian Games in Thailand last December.

Even defending overall champion, the Filipinos were crashing down to sixth place in the 11-nation field after managing only 41 gold medals, a far cry from their unprecedented haul of 113 in 2005.

The failure their worst finish since joining the biennial operation in 1977 of the worst-host because Singapore, which has yet to win an overall title among the seven original SEA Games nations, salvaged fifth place with just a two-gold haul over the Filipinos, 43-41.

From a disastrous campaign emerged a gallery of goats made up of athletes from eight national sports associations who failed to reach the winners' row after contributing a total of 27 golds the last time.

The golden boots came from traditional bust-outing, wrestling, boxing, shooting, karate, muay thai, golf and baseball.

Boxing was another disappointment but not because of the fighters.

Faced with an impending war in the field brass and perhaps to keep the faith of patron Manny V. Pangilinan on his boxing intact, amateur boxing head Manny Lopez surrendered the seven title bouts the Filipinos, represented by their second team, had arranged against the Thais, who were hammered by all their top bets.

GOMEZ

HORWOOD

BAUTISTA

Lopez claimed his boys didn't have a chance because of biased judging, which he said led to the ban of the 8-9 female fighters to their Thai clients in city contest.

While the Philippine Olympic Committee backed Lopez's conquering decision, Philippine Sports Commission chief Butch Ramirez and former POC head Chito Loyola displayed the aches.

"It wasn't right, no matter how disgusting the judging may seem," said Loyola.

It was not a complete disaster for the 88 swimmers, though, with swimmers Miguel Molina emerging as the top male athletes of the Games.

The Philippines also cemented its supremacy in basketball behind a still-awesome squad hammered by Fil-Am Gabe Norwood, who was so good he earlier made the all-pro team that played in the Phil-Am qualifier for the Beijing Olympics last July.

But values it was Norwood's nerves as he stars a role for Hapee by himself in the PBL title playoffs against Harbour Centre recently, he had no more to give.

With a chance to increase Hapee's 76-77 lead one dozen to 7.8 seconds, Norwood crashed up and blew his one-free throw. Three seconds later, TY Tang tied the count with a free throw to send the game into overtime and Harbour went on to win a record fourth straight title.

As gross as Harbour's joy was the pain that Hapee had to endure.

Hapee had missed within a game of completing the first perfect championship season in the league after going 11-0, but lost Game 1 of the playoffs before still destroying in Game 3.

Incidentally, Yeng, along with teammate Rico Maierhofer, also rekindled the big on when the Letran Knights ended elimination of the U Red Warriors in the UAAP title series.

The Warriors were 14-0 and likewise stood on the verge of an unblemished championship season before they crumbled before a determined Archers' overcoming redemption after a year-long loss.

The story of frustration also came from Gomez, who admitted after the game that he simply did not have the heart to go all the way after surpassing all expectations to reach the WPC finals against Daniel Bisuth of England.

But while the new pool hotshot called Superman proved a major find when it counted most, Gomez looks a solid shot for glory in 2008.

VINCE SOBERANO: Proud to be Pinoy

Bacolod-born fighter muay world champ

By Cedrik P. Tupas, *Inquirer Visayas*

BACOLOD CITY... PEOPLE WHO KNOW HIM SEE not surprised that a quiet introvert soon-of-a-gun yields strikes despite his monstrous stature in a sport deeply entrenched in a foreign land.

In all but 18 years of his life, 40-year-old Filipino Vince Soberano has established himself as the pioneer of the indigenous martial art of muay thai.

"I'm not the best fighter out there, I'm just probably the most determined," Soberano, who won the lightweight and welterweight World Professional Muay Thai Federation championship before a sometimes crowd of 115,000 this year, told the Inquirer.

Determined is an apt word for someone who got hooked on the sport 23 years ago and turned down vacation in Bangkok to concentrate his attention on his new martial.

The turning point came one night in the Thai capital where the young Visayan brought by his father Joe, a lawyer, to the legendary Lumpini Stadium to watch a muay thai card.

"I knew it were anything like it before," the 5ft. 10-inch Asian athlete recalled. "I was shocked when the fighters knocked his opponents cold with a kick. But I really loved the sport the first time I saw it."

Soberano got so hooked he was able to persuade his father to enroll him at a muay thai school the next day. The following years saw him spending summers in Bangkok to sharpen his skills.

Although he has spent most of the past 23 years abroad, Soberano said he represents the Philippines each time he steps into the ring.

In a professional muay thai career spanning three decades, he has a record of 20 wins and 2 losses, with 20 knockouts and 6 TKOs. Soberano also dabbles in cultural classical arts, where he logs a professional record of 8 wins and 2 losses.

"When I turned pro in 1999 in Las Vegas, I was advised what to name. I would be famous and I told them I'm from the Philippines," said Soberano, who is now based in Beijing where he runs a martial arts school.

His latest conquest is the WPMTF welterweight title, which he won by knockout over a Thai opponent in the prestigious Ring's Cup before 60,000 fans at the Stadium Park in front of the Royal Palace in Bangkok in early December.

In August, Soberano sent Thai veteran Kongchai to the canvas for good with a wicked right hand to the kisser to win the lightweight title before a crowd of 50,000.

Muay thai may be dreaded by boxing and mixed martial arts in terms of commercial appeal but Soberano said it's not the romantic fanatic that lure people into fighting professionally.

"We fights for prestige, not money," he said, adding that the purse for a regular fight is between $1,000 and $5,000.

There is a sense of fulfillment in fighting the best, said Soberano, whose biggest purse was $25,000 during a fight in Japan.

Apart from his muay thai exploits, Soberano is also a trainer. In moving China's first professional MMA delegation to the Universal Reality Combat Championships in Shenzhen years ago, when the Chinese whipped their Filipino foes at the Araneta Coliseum.

A film and television production graduate from San Diego State University, Soberano actually "retired" from his lucrative US job as a cashman employer last year to focus on his fighting career.

The double-jobber is also pursuing a career in E.T., a combat sport that combines muay thai techniques from many styles, karate, taekwondo, savate, savabox, kickboxing and boxing.

In fact, he said he is scheduled for a 120-kg division qualifying fight in Japan on Jan. 18, 2008. He is also entering action in Europe's version of K-1 in Belgium and in the Netherlands later this year.

"I believe I train harder than any other fighter," he said. "I fight without pressure."

PSC to pursue own grassroots sports program

By Marc Anthony Reyes

THOUGH ITS FOCUS WILL BE ON THE Olympics, the Philippine Sports Commission is also setting aside millions of its budget to grassroots development this year.

PSC chair Butch Ramirez said the agency won't neglect its duty to build up the national pool of talents by organizing national championships and helping support the Palarong Pambansa which is run by the Department of Education.

"There is a need to have a fresh source of talents for the elite pool," said Ramirez. "That's why we will go full gear for the grassroots sports program this year."

The budget for the grassroots project is the same as that of the short-term Olympic program, which will be concentrated on 20 priorities expected to qualify for Beijing.

The PSC-organized national championships and the Palaro, however, might conflict with the Olympic Festival which was started early 2007 by the Philippine Olympic Committee.

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Irene's Fantasy steals the show from Drama Belle

By Musong R. Cuerillo

ALL IN THIS FIRST BIG WIN, DRAMA Belle provided all the drama.

Only this time, the drama benefited smiliers.

Outsider Irene's Fantasy came shooting out of a gap provided by Drama Belle at the turn for home yesterday to rule the Santa Ana Park Grand Championship race under Jesse H. Guce at the Santa Ana racetrack.

The three-year-old bay filly sent off as the fourth choice in a five-horn field, made the most out of an unexpected opportunity that came her way after Drama Belle and Armando Lumagui threw final spicy wide to the dusk for home.

And that was all the daughter of Carl's Career out of Arcadia Rocket needed as she gobbled up the fading favorite Copper Dive and Pato Dilema to win by more than three lengths over Drama Belle for the year-ending P500,000 bounty for owner RB Lacuesta.

Copper Dive, the three-year-old bay filly by Riverdaisy out of Copper Eye who entered P414,247 out of the total daily double handle of P1,203,047, was all alone in front for most of the 1,600-meter race before losing steam when it mattered.

Dilema, a leading candidate for the Jockey of the Year award, couldn't get anything from his mount when he asked for the joint as the charging rookie on three-up entering the final 200 meters.

Drama Belle, the close second choice who won the Dancing Cojuangco Stakes as a longshot in some three-horse field in Hawthorne, was the stayed in the middle of the fight when the opening came.

She clocked one minute and 35.6 seconds for the race on quarter times of 1:37, 23, 24', 24, 26'.

Longest-shot Fairy Queen under Lord Jimson was fifth.

The speedball Copper Dive was made the first choice early at the last minute and she ran a great race until the final quarter when her urge became heavy and the stayers in the field got their second wind.

Miller, Asi lead pack in key stats

By Musong R. Cuerillo

BOOSTING PHILIPPINE BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION MVP WILLIE MILLER and rues teammate Asi Taulava ended the year on top of two important statistical departments to justify their lofty stature in the league.

The 5-foot-10 Miller, Alaska's offensive lance, led everyone in scoring with a 22.58 clip in 36 games, while Taulava, playing for a new team but still packing the same punch, teamed a total of 233 rebounds in 17 games for a league-best 13.71 average.

Traded to Coca-Cola by Talk 'N Text, Taulava also grabbed an average of 5.5 offensive rebounds a night in Series by more than an offensive board the second-placed output of Sentinel Simmons of Air21.

"I feel young again," Taulava, who missed a season-high 16 boards in a 91-90 outing, said when reminded that he is leading the rebounding category.

"I just feel that I have to prove myself all over again."

Miller won his second MVP trophy at the end of last season. Like the first time he won it, Miller didn't have to contend with the other teams' stars, who were too busy for the second spot.

Miller is second in this category with 36.83, slightly longer than Yap, who was on the floor 36.75 minutes in 15 games.

Unwanted categories

But Taulava and Miller were also to the unwanted categories lists, with the Coca-Cola center running aloft in both given up with 2.58 a game and Miller swapping fifth spot in the turnover department with 3.41 more a game.

Mark Cheraton Tolisa, nine of Coca-Cola, with an average of slightly four blocks a night, was the topnotcher in the department, while Gincher's Billy Mamaril gave up a tournament-most 68 fouls in 36 games for an average of 4.25.

Top draft pick Jon de Vanon of Welcoat was 10th in the all-consent scoring list but was the best scoring and rebounding rookie that list with averages of 13.86 and 6.48, respectively.

The 6-foot-9 Enrique Rivera, selected second overall by San Miguel, averaged just five points and 3.2 rebounds.

Ryan Reyes, the 6-foot 5in. Letran guard, got tossed out of first spot in assists by Purefoods rookie free agent Cyrus Lanuza, who had 3.87 dishes a night.

Reyes averaged three assists, although he was the best offensive rebounding rookie in the list with 2.8 a game.

Coca-Cola assignment Sunday Rosario, the surprise package out of Emilio Aguinaldo College, was second in scoring with 12.29, while Reyes was third with 10.3.

LOOKING FOR 3RD MVP PLUM: Willie Miller steadies scoring.

FEELING YOUNG AGAIN: As Taulava has a point to prove.

China caging: Indonesia shows door to RP Telecoms

By Roy Luarca

SHUNYI, CHINA—INDONESIA TOOK ADVANtage of a horrendous fourth-quarter collapse by the 5th Annual Telecoms to score an 89-86 win Sunday night that knocked the Filipinos out of title contention in the 7th Zhong Guangguang Cup International basketball tournament here.

The Filipinos were within striking distance up to the end of the third quarter, 72-68, but came out flat in the final period, allowing the Indonesians to drop a crippling 16-2 bomb that sealed the outcome, 76-54, with less than five minutes to go.

It was the second straight loss in three games for 5th Avenue, which needs to win over Singapore on the first game.

Hong Kong	3	0
Indonesia	2	1
Taipei	1	2
5th Avenue	1	2
Singapore	1	2
Macau	0	3

Host Indonesia All Stars scored Singapore, 77-48, in the nightcap to keep its bid alive with a 2-1 card.

The Chinese, who bested the Filipinos, 80-77, on Sunday can still snatch the title since Indonesia and Hong Kong have yet to meet in the quadrennial event won by a Stella-backed squad in 2001.

Although the Filipinos completed 62 dubious rallies, they nevertheless clung close were game with a loose defense that allowed the Indonesians to knock in nine three-pointers, six coming from Annie Pribaramsos.

The nine-man East Avenue squad, including playing coach Jamiel Mendiola, also committed 15 turnovers.

The Indonesians, who pounded a 6-rather that can go 6-foot-7, 6-6 and 6-5, also had more rebounds 51 to 42 against the Filipinos' five.

"My players were affected by the burn calls," said Mendiola. "Every time we dozed in, the referees seemed find a way to impose momentum."

The Filipinos were within striking distance, 51-52, when the Indonesians closed the third quarter with a five-point spurt.

But the tilted straight dog Ronnie Zagala carried the fight for 5th Avenue with 26 points and 10 rebounds, but he got little offensive help. Luis Dilagenan was the only other Filipino in double digits with 11.

Hi-Ace Michael Andre Bartscher put up a strong short cardiomath with 14 rebounds as former prothanks Lim continued to be hampered by a bum stomach.

The scores:

INDONESIA 89—Arie 27, Setiadi 14, Fetsi 11, Lesmana 9, Sutanto 8, Wahib 5, Hakim 4, Sutanto 2

FIFTH AVENUE 86—Zagala 26, Dilagenan 11, Lim 8, Bartscher 7, Tiam 5, Dizon 5, Mendiola 3, Ilagan 2

Quarters: 20-16, 40-35, (52-52), 89-86

TOP RACERS: PLDT-Smart chair Manuel V. Pangilinan (center) and team boss Manny Pacquiao (third from left) strike a fighting pose during a reception to the team's backup of the national boxing team after it returned Sunday as the Palarong Pambansa Champion in Manila. With them are ABAP president Manny Lopez and PLDT-Smart EVP Anthony Pangilinan.

Lagman, Olivarez put away Milo tennis titles

JACOB LAGMAN OVERWHELMED Jonas Banks, 6-4, 6-1, and Eric Olivarez downed Boyd Llanes, 6-0, 7-6, yesterday to rule their respective divisions in the Milo Junior Tennis Cup at the Philam Homes Tennis Club in Quezon City.

Lagman, the young ace from Cebu who won two gold medals in the recent Malaysia Junior Invitational Championship, had to battle under the wilds Olivarez topped the under-16 singles division.

Lagman and Olivarez shared the limelight with Kim Samco, who came from behind to outscore a 4-6, 6-3, 10-11 win over Arnan Fuentebella in the boys' 16-under. Nic Wernander, who outlasted Jose Reda teammate David Arevalo, 3-6, 6-0, 10-8, for the junior women's 12-under crown, and Dhea Talmisniel who dominated the boys' 14-under bracket.

Clarisse Alcantara whipped Isel-Ciel Bautista, 6-2, 6-4, to rule the girls' 12-under; Mary Gonzales beat Amandha Cayetano, 6-4, 6-4, for the 14-under title; and Ivana Dena topped Cheyzee Mamaradlo, 6-4, 6-2, for the 16-under division.

The tournament was organized by the LTW and sanctioned by the Philippine Tennis Association.

Philam Homes Tennis Club official Abee Tia and CTW director Jessy Marcaida awarded the trophies and medals to the winners.

Malonso memoirs recall the good old days

"MY MEMOIRS, "A FORTY-COMING PUBlication written by retired Col. Julius Malonso, reformer former president of the Philippine Olympic Committee and eleven-th defender of the Olympic Movement, is a down-to-earth and informative book which recalls the good old days in the life of a man I call a "walking encyclopedia."

Now pushing 84, Malonso is out to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt what a great storyteller he is.

* * *

One highlight of this book is his memories of President Manuel L. Quezon, the first elected president of the defunct Philippine American Athletic Federation.

Quezon is often mistaken as the son of a Mindanao parish priest in the town of Baler, Surabao (now Aurora) because the priest recommended Quezon to be an agricadio (bright working student) at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila.

In fact, Quezon was the son of a retired Spanish sergeant Lhuan whom he inherited his volatile character and a retired Filipina teacher.

He finished his 8th course at Letran and continued his studies at the University of Santo Tomas, where he earned a law degree. Two of his classmates were Sergio Osmeña Jr. from an affluent family from Cebu, who had better grades than Quezon, and Vicente Madrigal from Bicol.

* * *

When Quezon became a successful politician and Madrigal a successful businessman, Quezon said, "I am a successful politician but not a millionaire. Madrigal is a successful businessman and he is a millionaire."

Quezon worked as the Original law office, then became a provincial fiscal and governor of Tayabas province. He later became a commissioner to the United States. Quezon ran for the Senate and became the Senate President to pass the way for his gaining the presidency of the Philippine Commonwealth. Quezon was elected president over Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo and Pr. Gregorio Aglipay. Osmeña was elected vice president.

During World War II, Quezon and his family fled to the United States and formed his government in exile. He died of tuberculosis on Aug. 1, 1944 at Saranac, New York.

* * *

Quezon used to change his mind at the last minute. The Philippine Long Distance Co. building was supposed to be situated on Muralla Street. Everything was ready for the groundbreaking ceremonies but Quezon discontinued the project, saying he did not like to decorate the historic Walled City.

Said he: "Only fools do not change their minds."

CLEAN LIVING

Manolo R. Mojo

He was surrounded by strong Cabinet members headed by Justice Secretary Jose Abad Santos, Interior Secretary Rafael Alunan, Agriculture Secretary Vicente Singson Encarnacion, Vice President Osmeña who headed the education department and Finance Secretary Antonio de las Alas. Among the leading members of Congress were veteran parliamentarians Jose Yulo, Quirino Paredes and Eulogio "Amang" Rodriguez. Chief of Staff Gen. Basilio Valdez headed the military. The judiciary was energized of men with integrity like Jose P. Laurel and Norberto Romualdez.

* * *

When Magsaysay's formerly, the developer of New Manila, was giving Quezon their property for free on Aurora Avenue, Quezon City, the President politely rejected Hemady's offer. Instead he paid for it by installment so as not to be beholden to her.

* * *

Congratulations to Photolitics executive Rudy Crespo whose wife, Joyce, gave birth to a baby girl last Christmas eve. The loving couple will name their newborn child Isabella Jessica. And kudos to jeweler Lito Thomas Arbas for the medical missions under the auspices of the UN Foundation based in Weyauwega, Bukidnon. I attended recently (with my sister, Sen. Claudio Teehankee, my brother-and daughter Grace) the 54th wedding anniversary of Lito's mom, Nena, at the family-owned Mercantile Hotel and Spa where gifts were handed out, including wheelchairs for the less fortunate members.

Inquirer Sports' top choices for 2007

10 of the best

Archers win redemption; Briton fells 'Superman'

IN THIS SECOND AND LAST PART OF INQUIRER SPORTS' yearender, we present the bottom half of our Top 10 story selections for 2007 based on their impact on the sports-loving Filipino and on the sporting landscape.

The amazing exploits of Filipino professional [illegible] tactic Manny Pacquiao and Gerlan Antonio topped this Sports Quadrangle, followed by the country's mark-ballyhooed return to the international basketball scene after [illegible] years of suspension imposed by the PBA.

The Philippines' humiliating slide from overall champion to ninth place in the 24th Southeast Asian Games in Thailand was our third choice, followed by the return to international prominence of the country's finest pre-Boxer tackle Frankie Ildefonso and chess Paguntan.

Add to our list was the incredible feat of chess ace Jol Bindy Sombre, at 14 years, one month and 28 days old, became the newest youngest player in history to achieve grandmaster status. He is currently the world's youngest GM. — Jol

By Francis T. Gloria

6. Hail, hail, Jail

The fabled De La Salle University basketball program could not have sunk lower than in 2006.

Struck by an eligibility controversy and suspended from the UAAP last year, La Salle was left to cool its heels and to ponder a recruitment program that had once been the backbone of a perennial league title — until the envy of many schools.

And from the sidelines, the Green Archers watched as the UAAP universe unfolded without half of the most popular rivalry in collegiate basketball history. They waited for their turn to get back to where they rightfully belonged.

And since that shot came, redemption became the main motivation for La Salle.

And judging by how their seasons went, it was a strong enough motivation.

From its depths of suspension and humiliation, La Salle ascended back to the pinnacle of glory leaving a litter of broken-hearted Warriors on its trail.

While many will remember the UAAP season at University of the East's revival that season nothing, this year will rightfully be known as the year La Salle took back the most prestigious crown in varsity sports and won it like a stallion coming to all the world to see.

Understandably, I think my players are finally not that great," said Green Archers coach Franz Pumaren. "But we worked as a team."

Indeed, flaunting their trademark defense, the Archers bamboozled UE in the finals, sweeping a team that went 14-0 in the elimination round and had hoped to paint the U-Belt district red.

Although they spent a year in the former, the majority of the Green Archers who returned were remnants of many UAAP wars. And in a thumpin-mishap-who-that became a battle of nerves, La Salle got the better of UE, which was coached by Fonzi's protégé Imalay Gindo.

"Experience was glaringly in our favor," said Pumaren. "My players are veterans of many wars."

7. Superman meets Lee Luther

There was a time in Philippine sport when the likes of Elvis "Bata" Reyes and Francisco "Django" Buenaventura made winning hatred regular and life. Igmo became numb to their constant triumphs.

So if that were not enough, the likes of Alex Pagulayan and Ronnie Alonte, who completed a golden double last year by becoming world champion in both 8- and 9-ball events, rose to the occasion to prove that the Philippines has enough depth to its billiard bench.

This year, that bench was barely rich.

Pagulayan recently warned with his hands-offstyle, Alonte could do no better than quarterfinal a SEA Games-ld. Ilimbo squad, and Reyes and Bustamante were reduced to winning minor prizes abroad.

And to the rest, the country pinned its hopes on Roberto Gomez.

He was a colorful cigar at the very least. Nicknamed Superman, he was like his fictional alter ego. He bolted to the news desk of a big TV network and went straight to the World Pool Championship finals crying to serve a whatever-produced Philippine campaign.

In the end, he ran into a rock and collected Darryl Peach of England to end to serve sixteen finals and had the chance to wear proudly the Philippine flag right here in the country.

"I am so depressed," Gomez, whose life-dream border from the University of the Philippines in Mindanao, told reporters before breaking down for the second time. "I was almost there and I did not take the crown. I am sorry."

Those who cheered the event closely knew where the keyword in that failed Superman was located. It was in his nerves.

Peach won the title, 17-15, and it seemed that he did so by outmuscling more strengths. Against wanted a lifelong graduating pressure. Frankie Lee wanted a spectacular rookie year in head coach. Everybody got what they wanted — at least, everybody in the San Beda side of the arena.

The Red Cocoa overwhelmed a to-headlining Lyceum squad in the finals to win a first back-to-back crown since the 1977-78 seasons. Lim, interestingly, was one of the quarterbacks of those San Beda squads.

This year, he was the coach. And when he was not engaging Jose Road Uy, he'd frequently in other team type verbal spats. So was pitching San Beda's defense of the crown. And Lim finds he succeeded because of one reason.

"I'm lucky to have intelligent players," said Lim. "I feel very rewarded."

Ogie Menor was the catalyst for this latter title, one which gave the league virgins around some of the stickiest to taste it had ever some face-to-face with.

The league suspended Philippine Christian University when its high school basketball team was found guilty of enlisting identities of players for eligibility purposes. St. Benilde's Blanko Cabrera was nabbed for faking payment a PBO was chipped on the league when Alaska's application for the PBA draft — unsuccessful, said the NCAA — went under fire, and even the wild-mannered Howe caught his own share of controversy.

How low his eligibility for the MVP race when he was suspended for kicking Serpentel Height's Sang Lee Jun after being on the receiving end of a Bogtas foul.

In the end, though, nothing could stop Howe from claiming the trophy that the Hispanos saved most silver. With Howe at the firing end of the deciding foul-gasses, San Beda captured its second championship in as many years, leaving in its wake a hint of a third one.

THEY MAY have only made it to the bottom half of our list, but as far as the De La Salle-University Green Archers are concerned, after destroying the title hopes of a heavily-favored University of the East squad that went 14-0 in the eliminations round, they have every right to call themselves No. 1. — INQUIRER

ROBERTO Gomez lines up a shot during the World Pool Championship held at the Araneta Coliseum. The man dubbed "Superman" in a rookie-crazy sport ended up in defeat in the game for nothing but conflict of the Filipino's talents for greatness. After an amazing run to the finals, Gomez lost his nerve and bowed to Englishman Darryl Peach, who incidentally looks like Lex Luthor.

Indeed, flaunting their trademark defense, the Archers **bamboozled** UE in the finals, sweeping a team that went 14-0 in the elimination round and had hoped to **paint** the U-Belt district red

8. Lions' pride

Count on the NCAA to always find its way into controversy. This season, it had two this season every problem it could get its hands on. From the Samuel Ajanisi saga, the temporary restraining order that resulted from it, the game-fixing controversy to another nearly-getting-into-fistfights, the NCAA sure looked itself another colorful season.

And, did we mention that a school was suspended for falsifying records?

Add to that two coaches who became some semblance of normalcy within the league.

Nigerian Sam Ilhow was back for the fourth bout-bout.

Oh, and maybe this is worth mentioning. With his shaven pate, Peach surely resembled the villainous Lex Luthor in more ways than one.

6. Lions' pride

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9. Beijing, here we come

Lost in the swirl of the controversy caused by the walkout/protest of the BP boxing squad in the 24th SEA Games in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, recently was one of its members, who climbed back to responsibility.

Harry Tabonior, once defined from the BP squad's Team A because of a sudden drop in form and motivation, for reasons that even included the supernatural, landed an Olympic slot by finishing with a silver medal in the World Boxing Championships held in Chicago last month.

Tabonior lost in the finals to China's Zhu Shiming, a fighter he might meet again in the Beijing Olympiad next year. He had only needed a bronze medal in the championships to land a berth in the 2008 Olympics.

Tabonior won't be the only Filipino there. In fact, he wasn't even the first.

Last September, Mark Ptah Javier joined the Asian championships to bring to also-ran an Olympic berth in archery.

But boxing is highly regarded as a sport that could end the country's gold medal drought in the quadrennial Games.

Taekwondo, the other half of the country's gold medal hope, did not fail, sending Tshenber Gove Beijing on a qualifying tournament held in Manchester, England.

He said it was a heavy draw-driven with Olympic, World and Asian champion Jones Inson a bronze medal, enough to book a slot to Beijing.

"I called all the saints," said the 20-year-old Go.

Taekwondo later made it two Olympians when Dharlo Antonio Rivera finished with a silver medal in the Asian qualifying in Vietnam.

More Olympic qualifiers are slated next year, with archers, boxers and judo all gearing up to try and make it to the ultimate sporting event.

10. Hail out, nobody is

Hail Yulo was going about his business in Yokohama, Japan, taking care of the needs of his Philippine team that was nothing an Olympic berth there when he received the call that changed his life.

The Negros Coach debarred the lawyer PBA commissioner on charges of immorality, but it wasn't until the IOP contingent flew home after their failed bid in the Asian championships that Yulo felt the repercussions of the decision.

After realizing that the board of the PBA had lost its faith in him and was about to oust him out, Yulo resigned as commissioner of the country's biggest sports and entertainment spectacle.

"To save the pain of the people who matter most to me, my family and all of my children, and to shield the league I truly care for, I am today tendering my immediate resignation," Yulo, his voice low and mostly trailing, said his statement before a packed press conference in the league's offices in Libis, Quezon City, last Aug. 7.

The news of mid-summer events pushed the league into a crisis, with a new season coming up and a crucial post still vacant.

After much deliberation, the board of governors debated making a replacement, installing instead former executive director Jeong Ramos as officer-in-charge.

Then, a committee was formed to look into the replacement for Yulo.

Initially that committee came up with a list of candidates and soon they have a commissioner named by Bro. Eli. The list was pared down to two — telecommunications executive Lamberto Ramos, lawyer and PBA legal counsel-in-leave Chito Salud and COP executive director Patrick Gregorio — but the board failed to meet its deadline, before postponing the decision until next year.

Gregorio was awoken off the list after he received the lowest number of votes in the first round of the selection process.

In the second round, the vote was deadlocked 5-5 in 1-4 count, with a candidate needing six votes to claim the coveted seat.

Depending on whose camp you were talking to, either Ramos or Salud was one strong vote from being named PBA commissioner.

Incidentally, Emilio "Boy" Bernardino Jr., the commissioner whom Yulo replaced, died last March after another heart attack. Bernardino served the pro league for nine distinguished years.

GO. Beijing bound

BOTTOM Celtics forward Kevin Garnett (left) rejects a shot by Los Angeles Lakers guard Jordan Farmar. Garnett and the Celtics completed a season sweep of the Lakers. AFP

RTS

Hot Blazers, Celtics cream opponents

LOS ANGELES—THE LAKERS' Phil Jackson will pass late Boston legend Red Auerbach on the all-time coaching wins list. But it didn't happen on the Celtics' watch.

The Celtics completed their first-game 3-peat over the Lakers with a 110-91 victory over the Lakers Sunday at Staples Center.

Boston improved to an NBA-best 26-3. Jackson remained tied with Auerbach with 938 career wins, seventh in NBA history.

Boston is now 12-2 away from TD Banknorth Garden and is 8-0 against the Western Conference.

Paul Pierce had 33 points to lead the way for Boston, which also got 22 points and 12 rebounds from Kevin Garnett. Ray Allen added 20 points.

"[Going 4-0] was our goal," said Celtics coach Doc Rivers. "We mostly talk about more than one game [at a time]. But before we left, I said, 'Guys, let's try and get 4-0.'"

The Lakers' Kobe Bryant scored 22 points but hit just 6 of 23 from the floor. And the game was more than a bit chippy as seven technical fouls were called.

Three came on a late play when LAs Lamar Odom exercised what seemed like a rolling body block on Ray Allen. Odom was called for a flagrant foul on the play, Allen drawing a technical.

The Celtics had a major injury to deal with, as starting point guard Rajon Rondo was out with a right knee, sitting injury. With Rondo out, the Celtics inserted Tony Allen for the third time this season.

On Throwback Night, the Lakers wore short shorts, while the Celtic leaders wore the old Paula Abdul-cut-offs. A video display during introductions showed highlights of their lo-bled rivalry too.

There also was some early tomfoolery by both teams, as Boston's Garnett and backlink Perkins and Los Angeles's Bryant and Trevor Ariza were slapped with technicals.

With the Celtics ahead, 45-36, there was more physical play when Garnett was cut above the right eye after he bumped Lakers center Andrew Bynum. An angry Garnett pointed out the cut to the referees and went to the locker room with blood streaming down his face.

In Portland, the Trail Blazers rolled in their 13th consecutive victory on Sunday with a crushing 97-73 win over the Philadelphia 76ers.

The Trail Blazers, who have not lost since Dec. 2, got 22 points from Brandon Roy and went on a 21-0 run in the third and fourth quarters to overtake the 76ers. Portland outscored Philadelphia 35-9 in the fourth.

"They were driving, and we were stopping them and they weren't getting back on defense," Roy said.

In other NBA games, Baron Davis had 28 points as the Golden State Warriors snapped a seven-game losing streak in Denver with a 109-95 victory over the Nuggets.

Tony Parker and Tim Duncan each scored 26 points and the San Antonio Spurs handed the Memphis Grizzlies a 111-97 defeat.

Amare Stoudemire's 31 points and 17 rebounds keyed a 117-102 road win by the Phoenix Suns over the Sacramento Kings.

Ben Gordon scored 23 points as the Chicago Bulls beat the New York Knicks, 100-83. AFP/XH, Reuters

Williams powers US past Czech Republic

PERTH, AUSTRALIA—SERENA WILLIAMS shrugged off her jet lag to lead the United States to a 3-0 victory over the Czech Republic at the Hopman Cup mixed team tennis tournament on Monday.

Little more than 24 hours after stepping off a transatlantic flight to Perth, the seventh-ranked Williams opened her season with a three-set win over Lucie Safarova, and said she still had the desire to regain the top world ranking.

"Of course, I want to be No. 1 and I want to win Grand Slams," said Williams, who has already won eight Grand Slam titles.

"I wouldn't be out there if I didn't have those goals."

Williams thanked Safarova in the first set 6-4 thanks to her big serves and powerful ground strokes. But her last two range in the second and the 23rd ranked Safarova fought back, forcing a deciding third set.

The 26-year-old American's experience then came into play and she showed her undisputed grit to ensure victory, 6-0, 2-6, 7-5.

The Group B tie was decided when an ailing Tomas Berdych was forced to withdraw from the mixed doubles against Williams and partner Mardy Fish, giving the United States an unbeatable 2-0 lead.

Fish was given a walkover in the match singles, completing the 3-0 sweep.

The Americans are now in prime position to reach Friday's final, having beaten India in their opening-tie encounter yesterday. AFP

Okay, you can start hating them Celtics again

By Paul Oberjuerge
Columnist, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES—PEEL PRIE TO hate the Boston Celtics. Again.

Especially if you are a Lakers fan.

Or an NBA fan. Or any right-thinking American who lives outside metropolitan Boston.

The immediate Celtics are back, looking best-and-taking games, and if you are an NBA observer of a certain age—say, 30 or older—you're already starting to get cramped out.

Pre-oldest remember when the Celtics used to win. It all. All the time. So often, it was unnatural.

Sixteen NBA championships, to be exact. And nine of them came over the Lakers, most in some excruciating, infuriating fashion.

The Celtics got old Sweeneys on that weird, pumped floor at the old Boston Garden. They were the beneficiary of strange calls and questionable calls. It was pretty much enlightenment, and it often ended with prosperous Celtics coach Red Auerbach fighting up nose-to-nipsers at midcourt.

The New York Yankees? They were coddly and lovable, compared to the Celtics.

Boston won fifth championship No. 16 in 1986, but to the Lakers in 1987 and then the Larry Bird-Kevin McHale-Robert Parish Celtics got old, and the franchise declined into mere underachievers. To the point where we almost [almost] felt sorry for them.

Not now.

The Celtics are back. In a big, green-monster way.

ON A NIGHT when throwback uniforms—including those short shorts—make Andrew Bynum (left) and Rasa Bryant (No. 24) look like stars of a long-gone era, Boston proved that the Celtics of old are back to reignite a rivalry with the Los Angeles Lakers. AP

They turned up at Staples Center on Sunday, playing their fourth road game in five days, winning starting point guard Rajon Rondo and they annihilated the Lakers, 110-91.

Boston now is 26-3, on pace to break the NBA record for victories in a season, mostly because they boast the league's only collection of three currently relevant superstars—Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen and Paul Pierce.

Put it there, it was over then. Just [cue the Carter].

Old favorite Jerry West was wearing as the Lakers' honorary captain and both teams whipped out the retro uniforms—with the Lakers adding the retro, short-shorts.

And what we appeared to have was the revival of what once was the league's most intense rivalry.

Pierce orchestrated finals? Both teams playing as if it were June and not December? Did Pierce and Lamar Odom leading shoves? And now Bynaut's elbow leaving an enormous, bloody gash over the right eye of Garnett?

All in the first half.

Before bumblings began, some of the participants conceded it wasn't just another game.

"This one means it," Celtics coach Doc Rivers said. "Everybody's been talking about the game.

"Last year, I don't know if anybody noticed we played each other, and maybe that was a good thing."

That was when the Celtics were 24-16. Before they acquired Garnett and Allen in summery trades. When the Lakers and Celtics meant nothing to anyone.

Hint, how things changed in a hurry.

Said Allen, the veteran guard and Kobe Bryant foil: "Back in the day, it was pretty intense. As often as the Lakers and Celtics were on TV, you would have thought they were the only teams in the league. I thought they played each other every other week."

The Celtics won easily, 107-94, in Boston on Nov. 23. The Lakers hung around for a half Sunday, then the Celtics turned it up and blew out a Lakers team that was rolling when the game started.

Paul Shirley shot head-to-head contest for this season. Though it would be NBA nirvana if these teams somehow somehow a way to meet in the Finals. Wake up the echoes, and all.

The Celtics have an excellent chance to be there. Led by Garnett, they have the league's best defense. The Lakers struggled to shoot 21 percent from the field against them.

The Celtics showed the Lakers how far they are from the big prize.

They're young and they have some quality teams to draw past to get to the Finals.

Whatever gets the Celtics, in the Finals, will boast their fourth ball. Like old times. The Celtics are big and bad, crushing all before them. They are the official bogeymen of the NBA. Again.

Feel free to loathe them. I'm sure you remember how. Supplied by the NYTimes News Service

TOM BRADY (right) and Randy Moss savor the sight of a perfect season, knowing they have more work to do in the playoffs. AFP

'Perfect' Patriots finally celebrate–a little

EAST RUTHERFORD, NEW JERSEY— IT'S like finding out you won the lottery—then receiving stern orders not to cash in your tickets for another month.

It's like finally wearing that coveted hole-in-one on New England's toughest golf course but being ordered not to brag about it until you reach the 19th hole.

The Patriots aren't at the 19th hole yet—there's a trio of playoff games still on their Pursuit of Perfection docket—but their coach finally authorized his players to release some of the pent-up excitement that has been bubbling since it became apparent their football team had an opportunity to run the table in the regular season.

There was no champagne uncorked after New England held off the gritty New York Giants, 39-35, Saturday night, since premature celebrations of that nature are viewed as hexing. But the Patriots finally were able to unwind. And by going 16-0 they have just accomplished something truly memorable and gratifying.

"We're hoping to savor this for the next couple of days," said tight end Benjamin Watson, "but we've been trained so much not to, it might be kind of hard."

Although New England did an admirable job of keeping through its schedule with the disgust mind-set coach Bill Belichick demands, the anticipation of a win Saturday night did appear to leave the Patriots a little more emotional, even reckless, than previous games.

"Coach Belichick does a good job of keeping us in our own little bubble," said Watson.

In other words, no need to let the "perfect" Patriots tell sweet back to the team that "hasn't won anything" in seven- NYT News Service

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BUSINESS

Editor Raul D. Marcelo • Assistant Editor Carrie S. Nuñeza

NASA KTEB ANG SWERTE MO!

IMF raises concern on RP trade data

Galoc field on track to produce oil in Q1

By Abigail L. Ho

DESPITE DELAYS due to weather disturbances, the Galoc oil field consortium is still on track to drawing first oil from the Service Contract 14C-GSV-recent Northwest Palawan area within the first quarter.

Jeanne Williams, deputy managing director at second largest 3C 14C stakeholder Nido Petroleum Ltd., said the Galoc drilling program was interrupted several times in 2007, mainly because of the three typhoons that hit the country and some mechanical problems.

Despite that, the 3C 14C consortium was still on schedule to drew first oil from the contract area by March, she said.

The downside, however, was that the Galoc project cost also increased due to the delays, she said. For Nido's part, its cost share in the drilling program expenses rose by $4 million, including contingencies.

"This cost increase reflects a risk which is part and parcel of oil field developments. However, the impact is

MAIN STORY B4

Fund mission says import, export figures don't tally

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND MISSION THAT RECENTLY visited the Philippines has raised fresh concerns on the reliability of the country's trade statistics, government sources said.

The mission, which recently completed its annual country review, raised doubts on the import and export data provided by the National Statistics Office that did not tally with the data reported by its trading partners like China.

The IMF lent its technical expertise to the country five years ago to sort out trade transactions running through special economic zones, where locators are given generous fiscal incentives. At that time, some of the country's exports were being booked instead as capital flight.

Some government sources said the IMF's concerns were worth looking into, given rampant incidences of smuggling in the country that, in turn, were distorting import statistics. But others disagreed all the mission's concerns.

"They are assuming that our data are imperfect and that of our trading partners are not," a top government official said.

But the official said that based on the country's data on exports of minerals revenues importers of minerals by China, one of the biggest importers of those products from the Philippines, the data were pretty close.

But the official said smuggling was highly probable especially with regards to imports of oil. The official noted that some cargo ship losses carrying crude oil would

FOR SOURCE B2

Peso seen to continue rising

THE PESO GAINED 10.8 PERCENT IN 2007 to end the year at 41.28 against the US dollar, making it Asia's best-performing currency. And the local currency is widely expected to maintain its upward although at a more modest pace this year.

Manila-based currency traders expect the peso to surge past the 40.01 level—with the most optimistic projecting the currency to touch 35 this year, but more expect gains to be smaller compared to last year's.

Concerns are likewise creeping in on the adverse impact of a strong peso on crucial sectors, including exporters, households supported by remittances from overseas Filipino workers, business process outsourcing and tourism. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas itself has raised concerns on the peso's rapid appreciation.

"[Hitting] 39 is already almost a certainty that I believe it will hold as technically it

FROM B1

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

P41.28 = $1

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 28, 2007

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX

CLOSING

Chart and market report on Page B2

Shares close 1.3% lower

FINANCIAL MARKETS REMAIN CLOSED for the New Year holidays and trading resumes tomorrow with analysts expecting more upmove.

Stocks closed lower on Dec. 28, the last trading day for 2007, as investors cashed in gains from recent sessions. The composite index fell 84.04 points to 3,521.83.

The PSEi rose 21.4 percent in 2007 despite the turbulence in financial markets worldwide over a US housing slump and global credit crunch. AFP

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10) Winners shall agree to have their names and photos published in the newspaper or announced by any media or personnel of the Philippine Daily Inquirer may deem appropriate.

11) In case of dispute, the Philippine Daily Inquirer's decision shall be final.

12) All employees of the Philippine Daily Inquirer and relatives up to second degree of consanguinity or affinity and of its advertising agency are not allowed to participate in this contest.

Philippine Daily Inquirer

Slow start, bumpy ride for stocks this year

By Elizabeth Sanchez-Lacson

THE STOCK MARKET MAY BE IN for a down and guarded start in 2008 with the lingering US subprime lending issue shelling global investors' appetite for risk, analysts said.

However, they were quick to add that the stock market's momentum could pick up its pace toward the second half of the year, buoyed by continued local economic growth.

"I think next year, we are in for a bumpy ride. There is nothing wrong with our economy or corporate fundamentals but concerns will resolve around the subprime crisis and tightening credit standards," said Edgar Bacod, head of research at ATR Kim Eng Securities.

Global analysts estimated that lending firms could bleed by as much as $400 billion from subprime related debts.

"The issuance of write-offs and losses are keeping investors nervous. They don't want to reinvest all their money until they have a grasp of how much the possible losses are," Bacod added.

Campos Lanuza & Co. wrote in a research report that investors were in the midst of discounting the US subprime problem and they could be more confident in investing in the stock market, guided by more solid corporate earnings and other favorable economic indicators.

"We believe the investors and markets will begin to generate more confidence as 2008 unfolds and earnings reports roll in. At the moment, we do not see any emerging change in the economic or political front that could create a significant market decline to investors' worst (investors' view of the economy and opportunities in the market remain positive and stable)," Campos Lanuza said.

However, Campos Lanuza said investors harmed by the subprime problem would still be cautious to their investment luck in the first quarter.

"The direction for the (PSEi) will likely track the US equities markets and will be choppy. Investors are likely to see if the worse is over in terms of bank write-offs, unemployment rates, and inflation in the precautions, as well as how the Federal Reserve [regulations of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas] will respond," Campos Lanuza wrote.

Francisco Libon, president of FGU Securities Inc., said investors at the second quarter of 2008 can see a "period of consolidation" that is followed by a potential market bounce and rally.

"But it is subject to sustained economic growth which I believe is possible. My initial outlook calls for a weak first quarter, still largely influenced by Wall Street," Libon said.

Grimm Online.com president Conrado Bate also said that in the second half of 2008, markets might pick up as the risk appetite of global investors improve, with hopes that the credit market in the US may loosen up again.

"The only really positive news for Asia next year are high liquidity and strong domestic demand," Bate said.

To further boost investors' sentiments, ATRI Bacod said corporate earnings growth were likely to remain buoyant in 2008.

He sees corporate earnings growing by 15-16 percent next year compared with 13 percent in 2007 owned a backdrop of benign inflation, low interest rates and a strong peso.

Bacod also advised investors to be "defensive" in the first half next year and to mind buying stocks in the second half that are likely to withstand market volatility—such as utility stocks, telecommunications and consumer-related companies.

"Regardless of what happens, there is demand for their products," Bacod said.

He also sees the index hitting between 4,000 and 4,400 next year.

The PSE index (PSEi), the main barometer of local stock price movements, surged 21.4 percent to 3,621.6 points at the end of 2007, the index's highest yearend closing level, from 2,982.54 in 2006.

Analysts see PSEi rising past 4,000 mark

Peso . . . From page B1

is a very strong (dollar) support," said Philippine National Bank treasury Ramon Lim.

Lim said the dollar could bounce to P50 at this cycle as the greenback may start rebounding across global currency markets. He also predicted that there might be more room for interest rates to go down, with US Federal Reserve benchmark rates likely to ease by 100 basis points more to 3.25 percent this year.

"We're looking at 37. Growth fundamentals are still the reason but the movements will be very choppy," said Roland Aumate, treasurer at Citicorp Commercial Bank Philippines.

The most optimistic forecast was so far made by Asia United Bank senior vice president and head of treasury Romulo Agustin Jr., who said the peso would likely zoom to 35-37 against the greenback this year.

"Oil prices are expected to go down so there will be less (dollar) demand for oil import (also) requirement," Agustin said.

He added that US economic woes were still expected to go down this new year, with threats of recession to the world's biggest economy likely to prompt further monetary easing by the Fed. This, in turn, would result in a further depreciation of the dollar as lower interest rates drive see global funds to high-yielding assets in emerging Asia, including the Philippines.

Jose Emmanuel Alibalo, chief foreign exchange dealer at Banco de Oro EPCI, said the peso might break into the 39 level but only briefly this year.

"Its exchange rate losses (but) 40 may not be sustainable as it can affect exports and will make BPO and call centers business uncompetitive," Alibalo said.

"Weak dollar, which played a role in a stronger peso (regime), could be on the losing end (a stronger) dollar be seen in the second half of 2008 as the US economy recovers," he said.

A property downturn caused by rising delinquency among subprime or high-risk mortgage credit has resulted to a credit crunch that raised risks of a US economic recession.

For most of last year, the peso trailed the Indian rupee as Asia's top performer until November, when the seasonal pouring of remittances from Filipinos abroad powered the local currency.

The rupee, which gained 12 percent last year, ended 2007 a runner-up to the peso. Most other emerging Asian currencies likewise appreciated but at a more modest pace. Thai baht (7 percent), Malaysian ringgit (8.4 percent), Chinese renminbi (6.88 percent) and Singapore dollar (5.9 percent).

Currency traders' upbeat outlook on the peso was also in line with the bullish assessment by large offshore institutions.

In its new research "Asia economic prospects for 2008," Citigroup projected the peso climbing further to 37.50 against the greenback by end-2008 before closing down ahead of the next presidential elections in 2010.

BNP Paribas has also predicted the peso to rise to 37 this year and further to 35 next year.

American Express Bank and Bear Stearns, on the other hand, predicted a slower peso appreciation this year. Amex predicted the peso at 40 while Bear Stearns bet on a 41-42 exchange rate over the next 12 months.

(See U.S. slowdown ...

IMF raises concern . . . From page B1

executive the product to smaller vessels to the high seas.

"So if you look at the import (ratio, import GNP) is rising because of higher price but volume is steady or going down. Now can you reconcile that with an expanding economy?" the official said.

Yi cited's the situation, that should be addressed to BOC (Bureau of Customs), not BSP because the trade data of BSP were just being derived from Customs," the official explained.

In 2005, Philippine exports to China amounted to only $883 million and imports from China amounted to $3.06 billion, resulting to a trade deficit of $2.23 billion. By 2006, exports to China surged to $4.63 billion as against imports of only $3.63 billion, yielding a trade surplus of $980 million.

Despite the Philippines' lack of resources, most analysts, including those from international rating agencies, said that Philippine government data were fairly reliable.

The data and the classification of the goods in the transaction, however, need to be constantly reviewed and revised to keep up with the changing market conditions. In 2006, for example, it urged a revision of the NSO's exports data, which were showing slower growth than expected reports.

Galoc field . . .

From page B1

schedule has been maintained and I am excited in report that the oil from Galoc is already in oil" reported in March 2008, a more three months ago," she said.

The SC 14C group is now undertaking an appraisal program on its Northwest Palawan concessions to prepare for its second oil production.

As of Dec. 17, the consortium has successfully drilled a pilot well, recovered 28 meters of "core" from the reservoir, acquired a full suite of "logs," and collected five fluid samples.

The pilot well, the first to be drilled in the Galoc area since the 1980s, was designed as an "oil-and-abandon" hole that would be used to gather additional information on the reservoir.

A total of 27.8 meters of reservoir rock core was also cut and brought to the surface for physical examination and testing.

Williams said the core was recovered from the pilot well was "in excellent condition," with coring now being done at the ACE specialist laboratory in Bangkok.

Based on preliminary tests, she said the core confirmed the presence of oil. Data from the well showed a greater proportion of productive to unproductive reservoir rock, and confirmed the reservoir's potential to contain the estimated volumes of oil.

Five fluid samples have also been sent to the Schlumberger laboratories for analysis, with the results expected to come in within five to six weeks.

"These are excellent results from the appraisal program. Confirmation of oil in place has validated our positive view of the Galoc development and the analysis by Schlumberger and by the Gaffney, Cline and Associates reserves verification," Williams said.

"The pilot hole has achieved all of our data-gathering objectives and our exploration team is gratified that it has confirmed our predevelopment work. The DOA is now reviewing all the new data as we take the next steps toward commerciality of the reserves," she added.

Agriculture seen growing by 7%

Higher investments to boost '08 growth

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE FARM SECTOR IS EXPECTED to grow at a faster pace of 7 percent this year, to be boosted by higher investments to agro-industry projects.

This according to estimates of the Department of Agriculture, whose outlook for 2008 was presented by Sec. Joey Salceda during a meeting of the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) board last Friday.

For 2007, the farm sector was expected to grow by 6.5 percent.

Although the 2007 figure was "decent", agriculture officials said the growth rate could have been higher had it not been for the typhoons that adversely affected farm output.

Neda figures showed that among the key sectors of the economy, agriculture, fisheries and forestry (AFF) posted the slowest growth of 5.6 percent in the third quarter of 2007. The industry sector, including mining, expanded by 6.1 percent, while the services sector grew by 7.2 percent.

While the agriculture sector's share to the growth of the economy has been declining, that of the services sector—which includes the booming business process outsourcing industry—has been rising.

DA, however, believes that the AFF sector would be better off this year, basing its outlook on higher investments to agricultural projects.

Earlier, the Neda approved P216.5 billion worth of projects that would benefit the agricultural sector in 2008.

The projects will be financed by loans from foreign lenders, largely from the Asian Development Bank. The loan will be part of the government's borrowing program for 2008.

The recently approved projects include: The Agrarian Reform Communities Project (ARCP II), Second Cordillera Highland Agricultural Resource Management Project (CHARMP II), Participatory Irrigation Development Project and UMA Roots Project.

The ARCP II, which costs about P8.81 billion, is aimed at improving the productivity of farmers and teach them how to access financing.

The CHARMP II, which costs about P3.06 billion, was put together to reach farmers in the Cordillera Administrative Region about sustainable farming and conservation of natural resources.

The project covers 47 upland municipalities in the region's six provinces, namely, Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga and the Mountain Province.

Participatory Irrigation Development Project, worth P6.11 billion, involves the rehabilitation of 58 national irrigation systems.

The UMA Roots Project, worth P11.76 billion, involves the establishment and enhancement of 70 Rural-an Roll-off (Ro-Ro) ports to foster transportation between communities.

Economic managers said that while the robust growth of the services sector resulted in an improved GDP figure, the strong performance of the agriculture sector has the greater impact on reducing poverty incidence.

This because many of the country's poor families reside in agricultural areas and depend on farming for their livelihood.

NEW YEAR RUSH
People flock to Carmelo in Manila to do their last-minutes shopping for the celebration of the New Year. [ERIC DE GUZMAN]

P732M released for corn program

By Amy R. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE released some P732 million as of September to help boost local corn production to 6.74 million metric tons this year.

Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap said this amount represents 89 percent of the total fund allocated for the Countering Manageable Aid (UMA) Corn program worth P819.1 (1) million.

The UMA corn program is a flagship initiative of the DA to ensure corn sufficiency and raise incomes of corn producers.

Of the amount released, about P611 million was disbursed to the DA's regional field units to boost farm productivity of corn-dependents in major corn producing provinces.

Specifically, the corn-producing region of Cagayan Valley received P181,071 million, followed by Soccsargen with P66.648 million and Northern Mindanao with P50.098 million.

Yap said these funds also helped propel the growth of the corn sector in 8.5 percent in the first nine months of the year with production hitting 5.29 million metric tons.

In the third quarter alone, a total of 996,262 hectares have been planted to corn, which yielded 2.54 million MT.

Increases in production were noted in Northern Mindanao, which produced a total of 1,008,000 MT in the third quarter, followed by Central Mindanao with 969,000 MT and Cagayan Valley with 360,000 MT.

The availability of hybrid seeds through the UMA Corn Program and the good market price of corn greatly contributed to the sector's improved performance of corn during the first nine months of the year.

Yap added that the DA had stepped up the implementation of its corn production enhancement project, aimed at producing an additional 300,000 MT of corn during the lean months and regular cropping season.

The program likewise aims to provide corn farmers additional income of as much as P18,000 a hectare.

Enhanced funds were also used for projects to complement efforts of boosting production which include provision of new technology production inputs, post harvest facilities and marketing assistance to increase earnings.

Housing sector seen sustaining growth in next 3 yrs

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE HOUSING HOUSING SECTOR is nowhere near the US subprime credit debacle, with the continued strong showing of demand seen sustaining the sector's growth in the next three years, the state-owned Home Guaranty Corp. said.

In a recent presentation to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, HGC president Gonzalo Bengzon said that unlike in the United States, home loans in the Philippines were limited only to relatively wealthy people getting loans to buy houses for their use and not for investment purposes.

HGC is the loan government institution that guarantees against credit risks in housing. The guarantee it extends covers both the housing loans of home buyers and those of the subdivision developers. It is one of the five agencies supervised by the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council.

"Interest rates are subsidized for government-funded housing and rates are lower for lower-cost housing packages," he said.

"We already had our own housing subprime crisis," Bengzon said, adding that the market was able to dispel investor fears the housing woes in the mid-1980s and '90s.

He said home financing was still generally funded through traditional sources and there were not so much structured products outstanding.

Bengzon added there were a number of barriers to securitization or the conversion of asset into more marketable securities, typically for the purpose of raising cash by selling them to other investors. These include the following:

- pricing of volatility and risk factors;
- intermediation costs jacking up overall costs and making it more expensive than traditional lending;
- lack of specialist firms in related areas such as servicing, rating and other backroom requirements;
- lack of standardized documents as well as electronic and computerized infrastructure; and
- limited reluctance to sell land from big loans from their balance sheets.

Taxation and legal issues.

In the United States, the low interest rates resulted in excessive lending to borrowers, even to those of "low" credit standing. These subprime loans were securitized into structured financial products.

When the low-interest rate regime ended and rates started rising, the subprime borrowers found themselves with onerous mortgages against declining home prices and, for some, the home values fell below the loan balance.

The eventual defaults on subprime loans and the falling home prices affected the securities issued against these mortgages and housing-related transactions. Subsequent sell-offs of the structured instruments led to the valuation of these securities, resulting in big financial losses to big global banks.

For the next three years, Bengzon said demand for housing in the Philippines would remain strong. He estimated that average housing need or potential demand would range between 752,000 to 865,000 units each year.

Demand was seen to be fueled by declining interest rates, remittances and purchases by overseas Filipino workers, high liquidity in the financial system and increasing popularity of contracts-to-sell as an alternative financing scheme.

A contract-to-sell is an arrangement where the property title remains with the developer. The contract is converted into a real estate mortgage only when the buyer has completed a certain percentage of payment. This arrangement makes developers more aggressive in selling housing units. It also makes it easier for them to foreclose on units held by delinquent buyers.

Bengzon said the HGC and the National Home Mortgage Finance Corp. were likewise undertaking initiatives to develop the secondary mortgage market and the securitization of housing receivables.

Independent oil player to pursue IPO in Q1

By Abigail L. Ho

INDEPENDENT OIL FIRM ARKOIL PHILIPPINES INC. is keeping its first quarter target for its planned initial public offering, saying conditions exist it can raise the P2.5 billion to P3 billion it needs for its expansion plans.

Board president Glenn Yu said that oil-though investors were supposed to be a bit more cautious going into 2008, the oil firm was optimistic that its growth potential would encourage potential shareholders to invest in the company.

"Since there's a lot of a slowdown in the market, people still be looking for growth. Israel is a growth story, and I'm sure investors will see that," he said. "If you're going to invest in a company, especially for the long term, what you really look at is its potential for growth."

He said that while the oil firm was starting to its first quarter IPO schedule, it would still be considering all factors that could affect its listing on the Philippine Stock Exchange before making its next move.

"We're looking at the timing. We'll make the decision that's most beneficial for the company, for investors, shareholders and workforce. But we're still keeping the first quarter target, as of now," he said.

Small plans to sell between 20 percent and 30 percent of its capital stock to finance its planned nationwide expansion. It now operates 97 gasoline stations in Pangasinan, Tarlac and Nueva Ecija.

For 2008, the company targets to open another 126 stations, in addition to the 154 stations that are already in operation.

Of these 280 new stations, 29 percent will be located in Metro Manila, 27 percent in Mindanao, 19 percent in Northern Luzon, 13 percent in the Visayas and 11 percent in Southern Luzon.

Yu said 61 of the planned 126 stations were set to be opened as these were already in various stages of construction.

In an earlier interview, he said Israel planned to expand its retail network to more than 100 stations by 2011, using proceeds from its IPO. Each station would cost around P20 million, he said.

Electronics industry likely to meet 2007 target

By Rocrel W. Domingo

THE COUNTRY'S TOP EXPORT EARNER expects to meet its 5 percent growth target for 2007 despite the anticipated slowdown in the country's semiconductor exports due to the strong peso.

Dondon S. Santiago, president of the Semiconductor and Electronics Industry of the Philippines Inc., said in an interview that the electronics export target could be achieved considering that the sector posted a 6.4 percent growth as of October last year.

"Historically, earnings in November and December are high since this is the time of inventory build-up especially in major markets like the United States," Santiago explained.

"Demand from the US market has been good (in 2007) although the picture may not be the same in 2008," he added.

Santiago said that while there had been no official forecast for 2008, the general idea was that growth would be flat or less.

"Some believe it could be better but it could also be worse [even posting a decline]," the official said.

"The projection is that the US economy would be in a recession in 2008."

Further, Santiago said the industry would be monitoring whether investors build up demand in December as customary or in the first quarter—a sign that there is indeed a recession.

Last week, Philippine Exporters Confederation president Sergio Ortiz-Luis said overall export growth was expected at 6 percent in 2007, falling short of a double-digit target of 10 percent.

Ortiz-Luis said this was due to the continuous appreciation of the peso that threatened the viability of many export businesses, especially those of small-scale operators.

He said that aside from foreign exchange, factors affecting growth include the weakening of major markets, particularly that of the United States.

In December last year, Phillexport renewed calls for export groups to tap a P252-million fund to counter effects of a continually rising peso.

The group urged exporters to submit project proposals as only about P30 million of the Export Promotional Fund has been tapped so far.

The EPF was pooled from different sources—the trade and budget departments, the Bangko Sentral and the National Economic Development Authority—early last year amid the clamor of exporters for support in the face of the peso's dramatic strengthening of the year, which has appreciated by some 10 percent over the past two years.

Phillexport said the EPF had generated only a small fraction of the country's 19-exporting industry associations and Phillexport's 19 regional and provincial chapters.

From the Ivatans of Batanes
to the Tawi-tawians of Tawi-tawi
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BUSINESS

₱8.39-B power projects get tax perks

Gov't to review budget support plan for 2008

By Michelle V. Ramos

THE GOVERNMENT WILL INTERVIEW ITS BUDgetary support for 2008, and may even revise its plan to draw on official development assistance (ODA), called the Development Policy Loan (DPL), extended by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

Government officials are concerned that the resulting inflow of dollars may further strengthen the already bullish peso.

The government next year is supposed to receive a grant from the biggest foreign lenders.

Unlike any other ODA, the Development Policy Loan is not intended for a specific project, but is meant to beef up the government's budget for a priority program.

The DPL in 2008 would have followed the one received by the government two years ago. In 2006, the World Bank granted the Philippine government $250 million worth of DPL as incentive to further trim the budget deficit.

The amount of DPL for next year has not been set, but it may reach at least $250 million.

"We have to revisit that ($DPL for next year) in terms of timing," Finance Undersecretary Roberto Tan told reporters.

The Department of Finance believes that the piso is avail of a DPL next year has to be studied given the sharp rise of the peso, he added.

If the government would decide to pursue the DPL next year, Tan said, then the terms of the loan could at least be revised. Instead of being dollar-denominated, the loan could be in other currencies such as euro or yen.

This will help prevent the peso from further strengthening against the US dollar.

Earlier the National Economic and Development Authority called on the government to cut down on foreign loans.

Architects sought to help build 'disaster-proof' schools

By Abigail L. Mo

INDUSTRY LEADERS, PETRON CORP., in partnership with the National Disaster Coordinating Council, is calling on architectural firms and individual architects to take a shot at designing and building the world's safest school.

With the company's "Be Better, Build Better" program, the oil firm aims to "save lives through proactive management and education, and to disarm up assistance and support for a more well-informed citizenry in terms of disaster management."

The program will initially be implemented via the Millennium School Global Design Competition, which challenges architects from all over the world to design the "world's safest school" based on seven criteria: innovative construction methodology, cost effectivity, typhoon resistance, earthquake resistance, accessible site and building, flexibility of use, and adaptability of design to other sites.

According to Petron, the winning design will get a $50,000 prize, with the second and third placers to get $5,000 and $3,000, respectively. Special awards of $2,000 each category will likewise be handed out.

A prototype school based on the winning design will then be built in Naic, Cavadinos Bar—one of the most disaster-prone areas in the country.

Through the competition, Petron Foundation hopes to come up "with a structure that can not only function as a venue for learning, but as a sanctuary for those who may be displaced during calamities," said Maria Ana, the foundation's executive director.

The prototype school building will also be used as the Department of Education's model structure for future schools, as well as the country's contribution to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals for 2015.

Deadline for registration is on Jan. 11.

Generation facilities to be put up in Iloilo, Misamis Oriental

By Bernard W. Dominguez

THE BOARD OF INVESTMENTS HAS granted tax breaks to two power generation projects worth a combined ₱6.39 billion.

According to BOI documents, DM Consunji Power Corp. will build a coal-fired power plant with two 100-megawatt units in Concepcion town, Iloilo at a cost of about ₱5.46 billion.

DMCPI's venture, which would use "clean coal" technology of circulating fluidized bed combustion, will use coal produced from nearby Semirara Island.

The electricity generated by the plant will be sold to distribution utilities in Panay Island.

The project is expected to take up projected demand for an additional 100 load of 180 MW.

BOI said the all-Filipino firm's project qualifies it for fiscal and nonfiscal incentives, including tax holiday, under the Investment Priorities Plan.

"The IPP guidelines provide that for a power project to qualify, the cost must be at least $1 million per MW," BOI said. "[DMCPI's proposal was] computed at a cost of $1.83 million per MW."

The Iloilo plant is expected to start commercial operation in July 2010 and would create 957 jobs.

The other project is Philippine Sinter Corp.'s ₱1.03-billion power facility that would generate power from recovered waste heat from a sinter cooler.

A fully owned Japanese company, PSC operates a processing facility at the Phividec Industrial Estate in Misamis Oriental, which sinters ores or coarse ores into a single mass without melting.

The heated ores are subjected to high temperature and needs to be cooled before sorting and it is this waste heat that would be recovered and used to produce electricity.

To do this, PSC will install an 18.6-MW turbine generator, boiler and related equipment, which would produce a net of 15.6 MW it will start operation in March 2008.

The planned facility also qualified for certification of emission reduction that could be sold to companies or consortium bound under the Kyoto Protocol.

Project seeks to restore luster of ₱40-B coco industry

By Jerry M. Barros

UNDER A NEW INNOVATIVE PRODuction project, some 10 million coconuts were will be planted to over 100,000 hectares of land to help the P43-billion oleomic industry recover from the losses it incurred in 2006.

Already, Agriculture Secretary Arthur C. Yap has approved the production scheme, which is the brainchild of Philippine Coconut Authority Administrator Oscar G. Garin.

Under the "Gabi-Aramid," some 10 million seedlings will be planted using the most prolific open-pollinated coconut varieties. There are currently about 350 million coconut trees in the country.

Garin developed the formula based on his farming experiences in Gabaldon, Iloilo.

According to the PCA, the Gabi-Formula adopts the participatory and reward system where farmers get monetary incentives through the planting process. In short, farmers will earn a minimum of ₱50 for every tree that they will plant in the field for a period of one year.

A farmer can plant as many as 100 coconut trees a hectare, translating to incentives worth as much as ₱5,000 a hectare.

Initial funding for this production boosting scheme will be provided by the Coconut Industry Investment Fund.

As of end-September this year, coconut production posted a decline of 2.22 percent from a year ago.

TOMORROW in 2bU! – forecasts for 2008

LIFESTYLE
Editor Chuchi Bancal-Formoso

INSIDE OUT
Cory Quirino

Grateful for everyone who has touched my life

THE GOODNESS OF GOD IS MANIFESTED in all of creation.

Witnessing a magical sunrise and a majestic sunset give us many reasons why we should bless each day for being able to behold them.

We should be grateful for being alive and well and able to celebrate each moment as passionately and lovingly as the spirit moves us.

Each new day is a gift of life, so we should be thankful for new mornings, a gift of time bestowed to maximize living, not just to make meaning of our once life but, more importantly, to give meaning to others'.

For this day I am grateful.

Every person is a work of some profession and everyone in our life, whether parent or sibling, husband, wife or beloved, teacher, friend or foe, has a pre-ordained purpose in our existence.

I question not who they are or were to me. They each contributed a feeling, memory or experience that brought me closer to my authentic self, that part of me that is stripped of ego and values only truth, honesty, justice and love.

For their presence that brought happiness and laughter, courage, stability and enlightenment... yes, even challenges and pain, I say thank you.

Grateful for living Pinoy

We the earth I walk on, this country I call home, which is the only one I have...

While the promise of a more exciting and sophisticated lifestyle in a foreign country may seem inviting, I am glad I am a Filipino, proud to be one.

There is no other home for me. Thanks are in order for that land brimming with beauty and warmth, music and culture, history and color. Sung about the Filipino sense that sometimes go to the extremes of politicking, persistent and crazy, Filipinos are still kind, generous and forgiving. So, thank you Philippines.

To celebrate life is not possible with a body plagued with illness, a spirit darkened by evil or a heart burdened with bitterness. Therefore, I value good health, a body responsive to a wellness lifestyle. I exercise when time is sustained by unconditional loving and that books an expansive mind open to the consciousness of learning and transcendence.

Finally, I am grateful for you who are reading the musings of this soul in search of meaning. Through you, my thoughts and dreams may take wing. As Deepak Chopra, MD, says in his book "Ageless Body Timeless Mind," "Grace is said to be the praise of a lover."

I know that if I am able to place one seed in one heart today, then I will have a veritable forest of wellness in you.

It is said that gratitude should lie in the heart of all for peace to reign. A grateful heart never grows old but gets wiser. It unfolds like the thousand-petalled lotus with the passage of time.

Finally, thanks are in order for the miracles that occur after practicing the art of saying "Thank you, God."

Truth is, for every thank you spoken, a miracle awaits.

RP returns to polo competition

THE FILIPINO players, sporting Fila's newest 2008 classic spring summer collection, celebrate with Brazilian model Layssa Quirino

FILA THROW ITS SUPPORT BEHIND THE Philippine polo team that made an appearance in the recent Southeast Asian Games (SEAG) after 23 years.

The Philippine team composed of Jay de Jesus, Vincent Bitong, Tonio Salazar and Jami Elizalde, competed against four Asian groups: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

Before the games, the Filipino players, sporting Fila's newest 2008 classic spring summer collection, chilled with Brazilian model Layssa Quirino.

Polo was played at the private and posh Bling Power VII sports club, one of the only few polo fields in the world with stadium lights.

All second matches during the 10-day summer Outdoor under the lights.

Among those who watched the games were Mr. and Ms. Francisco Elizalde; Ma'Ani Elizalde; Mr. and Ms.

Gerardo Veloso; Conchitina Lukuy; Fila del Rosario-Belmes; Louie Castillejo; Ria Bitong; Alan, crown prince of Malaysia; and Bakrah, son-in-law of the Sultan of Brunei.

Thailand and the Philippines battled for the bronze medal in third place. The host country eventually took the bronze.

Still, it was a memorable moment for the Philippines that had not competed in polo since the time of Bing Arroyo, Bobby Aguirre, Nicky Jacinto and Lingpey Avanzia.

MEDICard, The Healthcare I Deserve!

Take Charge Doc!

What are the common injuries caused by firecrackers?

Firecracker related injury most frequently involves the hands/fingers (45%), eyes (30%) and head/face (15%). More than half of injuries occurring are burns. In the hands and fingers, firecracker blast injury can cause traumatic amputation of the fingers resulting in shortened finger/s and even loss of the fingers. In the eyes, contusions, lacerations and foreign bodies are frequently seen. Firecrackers can be associated with serious injuries such as blindness, third-degree burns, permanent scarring and loss of limb.

Shopper's elbow never felt this good.
And winning feels even better.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS:

DECEMBER 2
(PhP 100,000 EACH)
1.) WONG KAI SUEN
2.) MARY MARGARET S. JOSON

DECEMBER 9
(PhP 100,000 EACH)
1.) MA. TERESA BALLONADO
2.) MARCELINO J. HERRERA

DECEMBER 16
(PhP 200,000 EACH)
1.) EDWARD L. FUENTEBELLA
2.) JOSEPHINE RAMIREZ-SATO
3.) ADELAIDA IGNACIO
4.) MA. AURORA N. GONZALES

DECEMBER 23
(PhP 200,000 EACH)
1.) REYNALDO E. JOSE
2.) LUIS V. TORRES
3.) MARIE CHRISTINE ENCISO-VILLEGAS
4.) JOCELYN C. SUAYGILO

POWER PLANT MALL

JILL Kierulf, Jan Pham and Lillibeth Campos

LAIANA Kierulf—Louie, Tina, Jojo and Joey

THE MESS Santos, Andy Prinos and Marilou Sison

JENNY Lavina, Giuliano Grup, Lori Gibbs and Rosanna Strada

ALFREDO Baco, Pierre Mascarell and Alex Rosas

SEMI. Cecile Infantado, Francie Salinas, Hazmen Carmona, Baby Fernando, Conchita Roda

THE HOST. Jack 'n' roll star Rodjun Cruz, and his wife Francis Aguinaldo, the honoree Jojo and Henry Zubiaga

LUAU Tan Dan, Pepsi and Lillibeth Campos

A surprise party for a 'palangga'

ISABELL is the high-powered Alfa Romeo GTA

DELA Merced won the filmmaking competition

DELA Merced, John Imperial and Isabel Lopez

TEAM Philippines of the Marlboro Red Racing School: Willy Barcelon, Imperial, Dela Merced and Lopez. Inset: Imperial in a three-seater Ferrari

STATUESQUE, THUNDERING socialite Jojo Zubiaga was so surprised when she walked into the popular BJ bar in Makati.

She almost ran back in her car if friends BJ and Francis Jardeleza did not stop her.

Once back inside the bar, one of her friends and family greeted her "Happy Birthday."

Jojo's husband, international businessman Henry Zubiaga, had her believing they were meeting some friend from Switzerland.

Early birds included Sen Noli Jamel Renato Abejaudos; Bette Tan; Cherry Aguinaldo; Joe Vincent and Marybeth de Leon; Linda and Bob Manly; AJ and Therese Santos; party fiends Angela and Bernice Aguinaldo; and the celebrator's favorite sibling: Linda, Joey and Tina Gaisali, among others, palangas.

Swinging rock and roll music by legendary BJ and his indefatigable band had the fun investors dashing to the dance floor. Pliers spare ass me, the others danced near their tables.

Everyone enjoyed the bash and showed Jhek love for our palangga Jojo.

But the celebration did not end there. Next day an intimate dinner was hosted by close pals Maryanne Carmona and Lessie and Marilou Sison of La Tasca restaurant in the couple's plush apartment. Caviar, champagne and an excellent gourmet dinner were served, palangga.

SKAL is 26

It was a one-of-a-kind evening. Number officers and members of the two prestigious international travel and tourism organizations, SKAL International Makati, celebrated its 26th anniversary and gave recognition, the 19th SKAL Tourism Personality Awards, to distinguished counterpoppolites in business and government who contributed to the growth of the industry's challenge. By the way, palangga, SKAL is a Scandinavian acronym for camaraderie (Sandra, Astrid Gonzi, Alec Gong Ichi and Jocke Hoppe, read.

A five-star cocktail-dinner reception was held at InterContinental Hotel Manila, attended by everyone you know or read or hear about from government, to transport industry, diplomatic corps, travel and tourism, resorts and hotels.

The grandmaster for all seasons, executive secretary Robert Lim Joseph, SKAL International Makati president, led officials in giving the awards, whose recipients, past and present, include rapid eminent personalities.

This year's host, hot awardees were Ismael Rumsey Sy Sr., who received a special citation; Tourism Personality Awardees for Mall, Hotel and Resort Industry: worldwide Tourism Secretary Joseph Ace Durano, Government Personality of the Year; ace Ambassador Celso Gerardo Lopez; Outstanding Executive Secretary Garcia, Local Government Personality of the Year; Aniano Desiderio, Airline Personality of the Year; Christian Flemlim, Hotel Personality of the Year; Angel Ramon Bogaert, Travel & Tour Operator Personality of the Year; Francisco T. Gonzalez, Newsie Personality of the Year; and Hamad Al-Sharrah, Sheraton Manila Bay Hotel general manager of the Year.

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arnache

Photos by Alex Van Hoppe using Kodak EasyShare

Ultimate wheels

Check this out, palangga. Imagine speeding off in an Alfa Romeo GTA, a Ferrari 360, or a real Formula One race car. Not possible?

Well, three lucky winners of the Marlboro Red Racing School (MRRS) promotion can have this ultimate racing experience.

Only in Is Worried, Willy Barcelon and Isabel Lopez just joined in from Italy. They learned racing techniques from accredited instructors and race drivers and are getting behind the wheels of some of the most gorgeous, fastest racing machines ever built, darlings.

The three were selected from half a million participants in the 2007 Marlboro Red Racing School promo.

Eric Carandang, Marlboro brand manager says, "Since the last big in 2005, the Marlboro Red Racing School promotion has continued to grow in popularity. The success of this activity underscores Marlboro's ability to run successful promotional platforms that entice our adult smokers."

Willy B. won the Visionary Race, one of the most coveted awards.

The group went to Mugello, host known as the home of Ferrari and the Scuderia Ferrari Marlboro Formula One racing team. At the awesome Ferrari factory, they saw the production of 16 Ferraris every day, palangga.

Next stop was the legendary Fiorano Circuit, a 3.021-meter racetrack where all Ferrari race cars are tested.

The group drove Ferrari 360s and experienced the ultimate ride in a specially designed three-seater Ferrari Formula One that zoomed to speeds of 200 km per hour.

Hey that's really experiencing the biggest thrill with Marlboro and hot racing Italian cars, palangga.

SKAL International Makati president Robert Lim Joseph with the honorees or their representatives

TOURISM officials Oscar Petalcorin, Salvador Sarabia, and Sonia Garcia with Joseph and HJTASA president Tonty Duguiang

PAL president Jaime Bautista and InterCon's Christian Pinatos

COLUMNS. Transpresident Dondon Mallari, Tina Garcia, SMI Henry Sy Jr. and Phil. Wine Merchants president Ralph Lim Joseph

GULF Air's Bobby Nakum and Thai Airways' Miss Chamnanchart

The Law of Causality

Part V

ANOTHER HIDDEN LAW THAT governs our lives, the Law of Causality states that "everything has a cause."

Put another way, "There is no such thing as an accident or coincidence."

At first glance, it is difficult to accept this law from a purely logical standpoint because all of us must have experienced or witnessed coincidences before.

Things do happen sometimes for no apparent reason, or without any known cause. That is why we call them coincidences or accidents.

Let me cite several examples of extraordinary coincidences that have been documented:

1. A bouncing baby Joseph Figlock was walking down a street in Detroit in the 1930s when a baby fell on him from a high window. A year later the same baby fell on him again from the same window. Figlock and the baby both survived." (This was related by Mr Arthur Figlock of Michigan).

2. Double Jeopardy. "John Spiess of Leyden, Massachusetts, was killed by two bullets in the wounds on the left side (instead of the right side) on Jan. 25, 1797, during Shay's Rebellion in that state, he was wearing the same coat his brother Daniel had been wearing when he, too, was killed by two bullets on March 5, 1794.

"The bullets that killed John Spiess passed through the holes made by the bullets that killed his brother Daniel three years earlier."

3. The bullet that heard its mark. "In 1865 Henry Dagbard, of Honey Grove, Texas, killed his sweetheart, who then killed herself. Her brother tried to avenge her by shooting Dagbard, but the bullet only grazed the hero and hesitated to a rest. The brothers, believing that he had killed Dagbard, then took his own life.

Inner Awareness

Jaime Licauco

"In 1913 Dagbard was carving down the tree with the bullet in it. It was a difficult job, so he used dynamite. The explosion sent the old bullet through Dagbard's head and killed him."

"Coincidences are baffling," according to the founder's Digest book on mysteries, "because they seem to represent order arising by chance. They resemble the results of an orderly arrangement, but they do not have a causal connection that fits our experience. They violate our notions of cause and effect."

The great Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung had long been fascinated by the occurrence of coincidences and even invented a term for it: synchronicity.

As defined by Jung, it is the "simultaneous occurrence of two unrelated but meaningful events."

In his treatise "Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle," Jung related an extraordinary coincidence that enabled him to break the psychological resistance of a difficult patient.

"A young woman I was treating had, as a critical moment, a dream in which she was given a golden scarab. While she was telling me this dream, I sat with my back to the closed window. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, like a gentle tapping. I turned around and saw a flying insect knocking against the window pane from the outside. I opened the window and caught the creature in the air as it flew in. It was the nearest analogy to a golden scarab that one finds in our latitudes, a scarabaid beetle, the common rose-chafer (cetonia aurata), which contrary to its usual habits had evidently felt an urge to get into a dark room at this particular moment."

Why do coincidences happen if we say that everything has a cause?

It is possible that coincidences are simply our person of a long series of causal connections that we do not see. We see only the beginning and the end, but not the psychic or noumenous connections between them.

Those many be some mind as such that put those seemingly unrelated events together. In other words, there must be a cause behind these so-called coincidental events. That is what the Law of Causality says.

If we understand those key hidden or secret laws of nature, we will understand why certain things happen the way they do.

Renew your fitness goals this 2008

By Mitch Felipe
Correspondent

IS YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION TODAY exactly the same as last year's?

The most common fitness resolution after the holidays is to lose weight.

It is true that targeting weight loss can give you the motivation to commit to exercise. However, you may find it hard to reach your goal since weight loss is already the end result.

You should focus instead on ways to achieve your goal after finding your motivation.

Analyze what happened to you the previous year so you know what worked and what went wrong. If you repeat the same mistakes, you delay your progress and your motivation to persevere is weakened.

Change your perspective by focusing on more achievable fitness performance goals like improved endurance to get the benefits of exercise like weight loss, shapely body, improved health, reduced stress and improved mood.

Revise old goals

The mind set will let you stick to your exercise commitment the whole year and keep your thoughts away from your old goals:

"I need to improve my calorie burning skills to lose weight effectively."

Burn more calories by keeping yourself active all the time. Use a pedometer to assess your activity level right now, aside from your usual planned exercises. If you do not have any workout at all, target at least 10,000 steps a day to lose two to four pounds a month with proper eating.

Other activities like doing household chores, shopping and carrying grocery bags, climbing up and down stairs will contribute a lot in reaching your calorie target for the week.

Know your body weight and have your body fat percentage checked weekly or monthly to see if what you are losing is more fat and not water and lean muscle mass. This is important to assess if your fitness program and eating plan are well-balanced and suited to your goals.

"I need to improve my endurance for a better health."

An improved cardiovascular endurance means being able to sustain a certain activity continuously. It restores physical health by decreasing blood pressure and reducing one's risk of developing cardiovascular problems.

Test your endurance and see how you progress simply by observing the changes in level of difficulty doing a particular cardio exercise like brisk walking, doing aerobics dance or sports like swimming or cycling.

Choose your preferred cardio workout and record the time you can finish it, and the level, intensity and how you feel during the exercise. At best results, target at least 30 minutes daily.

"I need to improve my strength, then a better body shape will follow."

Do you want to build a particular body part or just maintain its shape? Progress will depend on exercise sets, repetitions, weight and rest periods.

Consult a credible fitness trainer how to execute properly exercises like proper squats, crunches, pushups and shoulder presses. Do weight training two to five times a week.

Test your upper body strength like chest, shoulders and arms by doing pushups and crunches for your abs.

You can reshape your target body parts and develop more toned abs, thighs, lower body, shoulders or arms with resistance training as well.

Check your girth measurements (chest, waist, hips, thighs and arms) in centimeters, the measure every month to see if you are getting the desired results.

"I need to improve my flexibility."

Being flexible can prevent you from developing injuries. It will also allow you to do a wider range of movements with every physical activity to enable you to learn more calories.

Perform correct stretching exercises for the back, hamstring (back thigh), quadriceps (front thigh), shoulders, chest by holding each stretch for 15-20 seconds while executing proper breathing.

Preferably, stretching should be done daily or after doing your physical activities.

Do yoga classes to increase your interest in flexibility exercises. Aside from flexibility, stress reduction and relaxation are the other things you can look forward to since flexibility-based classes are usually done in a quiet and relaxed environment and combined with breathing and meditation exercises.

"I need to improve my functional skills to have a better performance."

Being functional to activities of daily living is important to be able to move more, do more things and prevent yourself from injuries or accidents. This is also important for improving sports skills.

Do you want to climb up and down stairs with less effort? You can integrate exercises like step-ups to your workout routine. Do you carry loads in your daily routine?

The focus of fitness at present is to introduce more functional types of exercise, especially for adults and the elderly. Exercises that improve balance, core strength and stability are given much attention. The aim is to make people like exercises that use balance equipment and gym balls, as well as body weight exercise that integrates the use of all body parts.

E-mail the author at mitchfelipe@gmail.com

Picture-perfect smile

CLARITY AESTHETICS MEDICAL and Dental Center offers dental veneers to let you have the winning smile you want without the use of braces and invisalign.

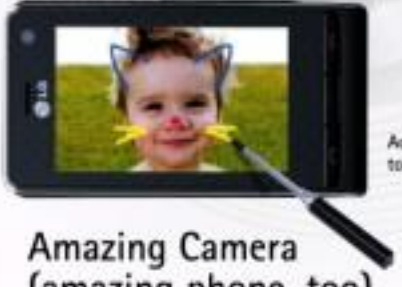
Also called porcelain laminates, veneers are artificial "shells" that look and feel natural. They are bonded to the original teeth to correct common dental problems like discoloration, misalignment, uneven length, and exodontosis.

If in normal circumstances, the dentist will assess the teeth indicated for dental veneers, as well as discuss the procedure and limitations, if there are any. Once everything is clear to the patient, the dentist starts to prepare the teeth to receive the laminates.

The dentist usually schedules a follow-up appointment to assess how the gums are responding to the veneers. When both doctor and patient are satisfied with the outcome, the procedure is considered done and the patient is officially declared ready for a close-up.

Aside from dental veneers, Clarity Aesthetics Medical and Dental Center offer a host of other dental services that will suit every patient's needs. Visit www.clarity.com.ph for more information.

LG
Life's Good



Add a personal touch to the photos you shoot.

Amazing Camera (amazing phone, too)

All the features you want in a digital camera and a cellphone.

- The only 5.0 megapixel camera certified by Schneider-Kreuznach, with auto and manual focus
- High speed video recording at 120 frames per second
- Panoramic shot feature
- SmartLight technology for clear pictures outdoors, indoors and at night
- Built-in Image Stabilizer with Direct Hardware Key
- Handwriting Recognition and Editing function to freely edit and enhance captured images
- Muvee™ + Direct Upload to YouTube.com (network dependent feature)
- Full Internet Browsing with Google Package
- Big 3-inch wide LCD touchscreen display
- 3G, HSDPA (3.6 Mbps), WCDMA, Tri-band connectivity
- DivX video playback

Viewty
THE SERIOUS CAMERA PHONE

Entrepreneur of the Year Bounty Agro Ventures Inc represented by Jovon Dy and Mark Triay awarded by SM Supermarket's President Herbert Sy and SM's President Tessie Sy-Coson.

Best Marketing Relations or the Darling of the Buyers" , Jun Alberto of Royal Processing & Canning Corp with SM Supermarket's President Herbert Sy and Annie Sy Go.

Francisco Lazaro and Allan Rex Ardova of JS Unitrade received the Golden Cart Award for National Partner of the Year from President of SM Supermarket Herbert Sy and President of SM Tessie Sy-Coson.

SM Supermarket Awards Outstanding Business Partners

SM Supermarket's President Ms. Herbert Sy welcomes Trade Partners during the 22nd Golden Cart Award at the Science Discovery Center.

SM Supermarket awarded its outstanding trade partners in the 22nd golden Cart Award at the SM Science Discovery Center at SM Mall Of Asia.

Christine Jacobs-Escalgan hosted the 22nd Golden Cart Awards at the SM Science Discovery Center.

SM dancers shows their futuristic moves during the awarding.

Mara Sy-Coson endorses the limited edition of 2008 SM Mall of Asia's Planner.

Diva Zia-zas Padilla performed during the awarding night.

SM Supermarket recently presented The **Golden Cart Award**, the most prestigious award in the supermarket industry. This ceremony, which took place at the Science and Discovery Center at the SM Mall of Asia, significantly highlights how forward-looking SM Supermarket is in its innovations and customer service. It is a testimony not only to the SM Supermarket's market leadership and consistency, but also the trust and acceptance it has earned by bringing quality products and excellent service to its consumers for many years.

The **Golden Card Award** is the first local supermarket award to recognize the **Best Trade Leaders** in the different aspect of the supermarket industry. A symbol of excellence in creating advancements in retail, the award is given to Trade Partners who exemplify SM Supermarket's dedication to being the First and the Best in the business.

All nominees were meticulously screened and chosen with all departments and aspects of the retail business development, marketing support, replenishment, and distribution of logistics support.

The highest award of the night is given to the supermarket's **Most Outstanding Trade Partners** for overall excellence in service level, marketing and promotions, and store relations. These include the **Bounty Agro Ventures Inc.**, for Entrepreneur of the Year; **JS Unitrade** for National Partner of the Year and **Unilever Phils Inc.**, for Global Partner of the Year.

Unilever Phils Inc., bagged the highest award of the night Most Outstanding Trade Partner-Global Partner of the Year, and other awards like Outstanding Store Relations, Most Progressive Overall Customer Service Level, Best In-store Campaign of the Year and Most effective (Ad) Campaign of the Year.

Other Trade Partners that brought home the Golden Card Award are:

San Miguel Corporation (CKAG) - Most Innovative Company -
Unilever Phils. Inc. Food Division - Most Progressive Customer Service Level
Colgate Palmolive Phils. - Most Creative In-Store Display
Pacsin - Most Competent Food Concessionaire of the Year
Knorr Strabswerg Caley - Most Effective (Ad) Campaign of the Year
Unilever Phils. Inc. Food Division
Coca Cola Bottlers Phils. - Most Progressive Trade Partner of the Year
Digital Issa Corporation - Outstanding Service Partner of the Year
Blue Mountain Worldwide Dist. Inc - Outstanding Store Concessionaire
Unilever Phils. Inc. Food Division - Outstanding Store Relations
San Miguel Corporation CKAG (Purefoods) - Excellence in Merchandiser Performance -
Choice Harvest - Excellence in Account Management
MGM Chemical Industry Co. - Excellence in Delivery Service
Green Cross, Incorporated - Excellence in Overall Customer Service Level
Unilever Phils. Inc. Non-Food Division - Best In-Store Campaign
Jun Alberto of Royal Processing & Canning Corp - Best Marketing Relations
Belo (Intelligent Skin Care Inc.) - Breakthrough Product of the Year

Breakthrough Product of the Year- Belo (Intelligent Skin Care Inc.) - From left) SM Supermarket's President Herbert Sy, Belo's Cristelle Herrares, Greg Ranson, Sirene Pandugan, Lervie Mendiola, Dadie Borja, SM's Annie Sy Go, and Belo's Dennis Galeb.

ENTERTAINMENT

Editor Emmie G. Velarde

WHY SUNSHINE STORMED OUT

THIS SIZZLING BRAZILIAN BEAUTY IS said to have been in her room that Sunshine Cruz stormed out of the home that she shares with husband Cesar Montano and their kids on Christmas Day. Dolly Anne Carvajal finds out how Buboy met Mariana Del Mar. Bollywood/D5

Spidey, Shrek, lead US top grossers in '07

"SPIDERMAN 3"

"SHREK the Third"

"TRANSFORMERS"

LOS ANGELES—FOLLOWING IS A list of the 25 films that topped $100 million at the US Cineplex box office this year through Dec. 25:

1) "Spider-Man 3," $336.5M
2) "Shrek the Third," $320.7M
3) "Transformers," $319.1M
4) "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End," $309.4M
5) "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," $292M
6) "Pan's Labyrinth," $37.6M
7) "300," $210.6M
8) "Ratatouille," $206.4M
9) "The Simpsons Movie," $183.1M
10) "Wild Hogs," $166.2M
11) "I Am Legend," $113.9M
12) "Bourne Ultimatum," $227.4M
13) "Alvin and the Chipmunks," $217.3M
14) "Meet the Robinsons," $97.2M
15) "Happy Feet," $197.8M
16) "Night at the Museum," $250.8M
17) "Ocean's Thirteen," $117.1M
18) "Alpha Dog," $14.1M
19) "Blades of Glory," $118.2M
20) "Norbit," $95.8M
21) "Meet the Fockers," $279.2M
22) "Dreamgirls," $103.3M
23) "Epic Movie," $39.7M
24) "Disturbia," $80.1M
25) "Hairspray," $118.8M

Figures were compiled by box office tracking service Media By Numbers. (Reuters)

Move over, Lloyd and Bea

FOREVER JOINABLE PAIRS TO THEIRS: so Manny Pacquiao and Jinkee Pacquiao have their John Lloyd Cruz and Bea Alonzo. You can also file the pics under "Photos the public almost failed to see." These publicity stops for the Metro Manila Film Festival entry "Sisid ng Sirena" were reportedly disapproved by someone close to the producers who just happens to be the lead star's wife. Incidentally, entertainment got hold of the pics quite by chance. We find nothing wrong with them—unless, of course, you're the movie's producer/lead star's wife.

Censors board chides top networks

By Marinell R. Cruz

THE MOVIE AND TELEVISION REVIEW AND CLASSIFICATION Board has reprimanded the National Broadcasting Network for airing material that "offended some viewers," said MTRCB chair Jesusa Laguardia.

In a memorandum dated Dec. 26, two MTRCB special agents reported that viewers had been upset by that day's episode of GMA 7's game show "Eat! Eat! Eat! sang Mike Enriquez," where the contestants were made to eat live worms.

"Several people complained," Laguardia explained in an interview on Friday.

In response to the MTRCB memo, GMA 7 vice president for program management Ana Liza Alarcon said the program would "take steps to ensure that on-screen presentations of graphic scenes ... [would] not offend ... the viewing public [in the future]."

Meanwhile, in a memo dated Dec. 13, two MTRCB special agents informed Laguardia of complaints in connection with Ethel Booba's "offending" statements on the show's "Pinoy Big Brother Celebrity Edition 2 ... Uno." Laguardia told Inquirer: "Ethel uttered the p-word many times. She also wore an outfit with a really low, or neckline and a fabric that was too thin. It looked like she were nothing but her bra."

The contested episode was aired at lunchtime on Studio 23.

In her letter to Laguardia, PSB production manager Ms. Theresa Herrera argued that Ethel's utterances "were made during a live broadcast and were completely unexpected." But the same, Herrera said, the network had undertaken some "measures in ... self-regulation."

Reuben added that the program apologized the next day through a spiel delivered by its host, Bianca Gonzalez.

FUN SNAPS FROM 2007

JUST WANNA HAVE FUN

Substituting for Candyman, Eddie was turned into a playgrounder April by the trademarks of the horror film "Candy"—from left, Desiree del Valle, Ina Cabardo, Alissa Ramos, Jodi Ann Sinsio and Jaiko Magbanua.

Unknown signal spotted over Manila's night sky for two nights in a row

"It's completely beyond my imagination."

GREENHILLS CINEMAS
THEATRE MALL
NOW SHOWING
1 DESPERADO 2 BANAL
PROMENADE
NOW SHOWING
3 4 5
MANANG NO

FEEDBACK

Robin's my idol
Irene Paul Agtarap
(heroesrule01@yahoo.com)

I live in Miami, Florida, and I just read your interview with Robin Padilla. Galingsyempahagi. Idol ! Wala lang. Expat ! Please let Robin know may fans siya rito. Salamat po.

A better year
Irene Cristy Ocsion
(cplg16@yahoo.com.ph)

Last year was better. This was my reaction after watching the schedules on GMA 7 and QTC 11.

Whatever message the concerned writers are trying to deliver, I just hope that next time, they'll truly instill the spirit of Christmas in our hearts. Before, if they will first see the nativity happening in our country and from there, they can probably come up with more relevant and appropriate concepts.

NOW SHOWING!
PANDORA ANG PINOY ROBOT!
GP ALL AGES RATED "A" BY THE CINEMA EVALUATION BOARD
RESIKLO
CINDERS OF WAR
JOHN LOYD MACRO

METRO
Citizen's Call
0918-0000000

MMTA MOVIE GUIDE
METRO MANILA THEATER ASSOCIATION
NOW SHOWING
OPENS SOON!!
CINEMA 1
CINEMA 2
CINEMA 3
CINEMA 4
CINEMA 5
CINEMA 6
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CINEMA 9
CINEMA 10
CINEMA 11
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AT THE CINEMAS
GLORIETTA 1
GLORIETTA 4
GREENBELT 1
GREENBELT 3
ALABANG TOWN CENTER
AYALA CENTER CEBU
MARKET! MARKET!
TRINOMA

AT THE MALLS
Ayala Malls
FREE Christmas Gift Bag for every P500 worth of purchase.
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FREE Christmas Gift Bag for every P500 worth of purchase.
FREE Christmas Gift Bag for every P500 worth of purchase.
Repertory Philippines presents
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FREE Christmas Gift Bag for every P500 worth of purchase.

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ALVIN
THE CHIPMUNKS
LIVE AT THE AYALA MALLS

DID YOU KNOW...

Penn, Wright divorcing

LOS ANGELES — Academy Award-winning actor-director Sean Penn is divorcing his wife of 15 years, People magazine reported on its website Friday.

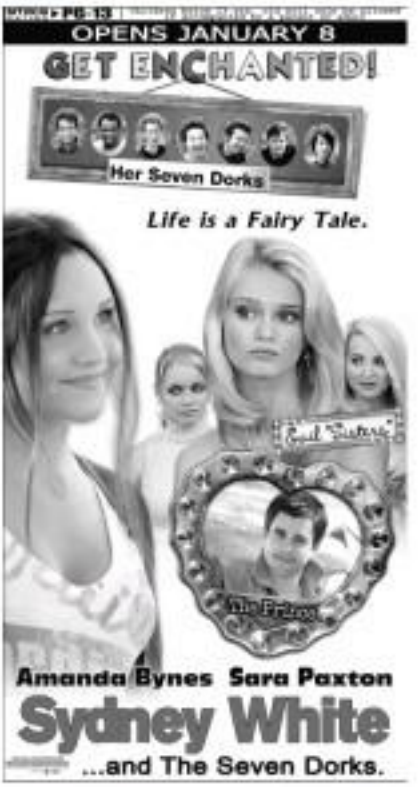
A spokeswoman for Penn and actress Robin Wright Penn confirmed the split to People without giving details.

Penn, 47, who won a Best Actor Oscar in 2004 for "Mystic River," began dating Wright in the early 1990s. The couple married in 1996 and have two children aged 14 and 10.

Wright, 42, has starred alongside her husband in several films including "State of Grace," "Hurlyburly" and "Must Be Lovely." Penn once told an interviewer: "Most nuggs ain't easy, but it's a great asset of the time. I love Robin. I've always loved her."

Penn was married to pop icon Madonna for four years from 1985 to 1989.

AFP



SM CINEMA

movietime SHOWTIME

Your life as a movie

It's the Enteng invasion at SM Cinema

Celebrate New Year with "Enteng Kabisote 4" at SM Cinema and be part of our exclusive premiere and activities!

Watch out for our Treasure Hunt, Arthur Solving, Wishlist, and other characters!

January 1 (Tuesday)
Fairview, 2PM pm
North EDSA, 3:00 pm
Manila, 4:00 pm
Megamall, 5:00 pm

Visit the COSTUME EXHIBIT showcasing actual costumes used in the movie at the Megamall cinema lobby

An official entry to the 32nd Metro Manila Film Festival Philippines

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www.robinsonsmovieworld.com

GALLERIA

1 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO – THE	6 IBANAL
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	7 ANAK ng KUMANDER
3 RESIKLO	8 BAHAY KUBO
4 DESPERADOS	9 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
5 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	10 ENTENG KABISOTE 4

ERMITA

1 RESIKLO	6 BAHAY KUBO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	7 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
3 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	1 IBANAL
4 ANAK ng KUMANDER	2 DESPERADAS
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	3 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO

METRO EAST

1 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	5 ENTENG KABISOTE 4
2 BAHAY KUBO	6 DESPERADAS
3 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	7 IBANAL
4 RESIKLO	8 ANAK ng KUMANDER

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1 RESIKLO	5 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	6 IBANAL
3 BAHAY KUBO	7 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
4 DESPERADAS	8 ANAK ng KUMANDER

PIONEER

1 DESPERADAS	3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
2 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	4 ENTENG KABISOTE 4

STA. ROSA

1 IBANAL	1 ENTENG KABISOTE 4
2 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	2 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
4 ENTANG KABISOTE 4	4 DESPERADAS
5 DESPERADAS	5 IBANAL

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1 IBANAL	4 RESIKLO
2 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	5 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	6 DESPERADAS
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	7 IBANAL
5 DESPERADAS	8 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
	9 ENTENG KABISOTE 4

IMUS

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1 DESPERADAS	1 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
2 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO	2 ENTENG KABISOTE 4
3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	3 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9
4 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	

TARLAC

STARMILLS

1 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	4 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
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3 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	6 IBANAL

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3 RESIKLO	3 IBANAL
4 SHAKE RATTLE and ROLL 9	4 BAKAL BAKALI BAKLOLO
5 ENTENG KABISOTE 4	5 ENTENG KABISOTE 4
6 BAHAY KUBO	6 ANAK ng KUMANDER

ILOILO

A diorama comic by CARLO J. CAPARAS

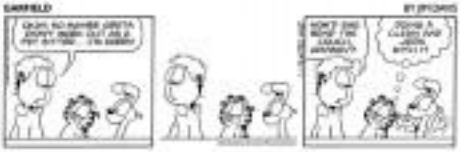
To have ♥ to hold

Art: ANNIELA. AVETRIA

A. LUPA — BY JESS ANTIEA

PUGAD BABOY — BY TITI JUNIOR

GARFIELD — BY JIM DAVIS



BABY BLUES — BY JERRY SCOTT

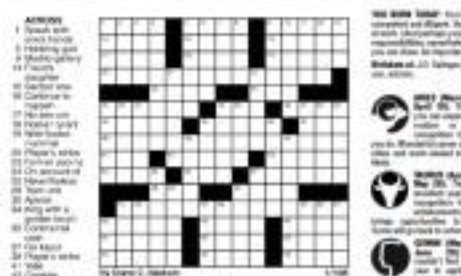
ATOMIC ANDY/WEEGY — BY LYNN GASCILLANO

LOVEKNOTS — BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO

KIKO MACHINE — BY TYRON ABERIA

BEN — BY DANIEL SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD



HOROSCOPE

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

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	7						8	
5			8					4
6						5		
4			9	5	3			8
		9						1
8					2			9
	2						5	
		6	3	8		4		

Difficulty Level ★★

HOW TO PLAY SUDOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Tips and programs at www.sudoku.com

Answers to previous puzzle

4	6	9	8	7	1	5	3	2
2	8	1	3	4	5	9	6	7
3	7	5	2	9	6	8	4	1
7	9	8	5	2	3	1	7	4
8	1	5	4	6	7	3	2	9
2	3	4	1	8	9	7	5	6
1	5	3	9	6	4	2	9	7
6	2	7	9	3	8	4	1	5
9	4	3	7	1	5	2	6	8

Brazilian model behind Cesar, Sunshine breakup

BORIS LIBARIO THE NEWS THAT LEHAR Montano and Sunshine Cruz had "separated"? Ito ba nga kaya, I know it was one of their juicy quarrels again.

Being a close friend of the couple, I've seen them in their unguarded moments. They are both television stars (understatement). Their every move—whether it be angry, jealousy or joy—is magnified.

Shine is super selos by nature. Bahay has a checkered past but now he has reformed.

The pinpalayad "redpot" of their current spat is 31-year-old Brazilian model Marianna del Rio. She is the ex-GF of Victor Basa. Marianna has appeared in many commercials (Lactacyd, LBC, Gamba, Lucky Me, Nova etc ...) and is taking acting workshops in ABS-CBN.

According to her good friend Carla de Sena, Bahay and Marianna met in his hometown in Bohol. He asked her to be his leading lady in an indie film that he would be producing.

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

SIXTEEN-year-old Marianna del Rio (right) "was used as ka-tigbas," says pal.

"Nakiusap si Bahay kay Marian, kasi nag-girlfriend siya nung Tagalog. We went to Bahay and Shine's penthouse in Bohol to attend a workshop. Their relationship is purely professional," ensured Carla. "Kaya nagulat ako when Sunshine called to interrogate me. I understand where she's coming from but some women brag unnecessarily agad-agad side ang. Achieved ITV boots called her up also and made nothing that she saw Bahay and Marian kissing in Hollywell. That's not true at all! Kung may nakasayan sila, siguro nagdig dancers sa bar! But there's nothing going on between them."

Marian Rivera based on Email is expected to be back days with her current GF.

Nervous

"She's wary of what M.M. (Ashraf Muslim) will say once that what Shine thinks," says Carla. "She's kinda nervous because she's not sure] in Instagram," Bahay introduced Marian and Carla to Shine when they bumped into one another at Rockwell. "If they were having an affair, eh di dapat di ma-introduce si Bahay sa Shinesday Shine."

At press time, Shine was not on this text." I don't want to say anything at the moment. I'm still hoping that this will be fixed for the sake of our family." And Bahay's message: "This is one of Shine's childish reactions. Someone just texted her and pretended I'm naked. She overreacted and made wild speculations. I did not have an affair or one night stand with a Brazilian lady. I'm not stupid. Mongol kung pinagpapanon ang pangalan ko especially now that I'm endorsing several products. I'm not going to ruin it just like that. I love my wife and my kids. Di ko sila pagpapalit para lang sa umiiking kalapastanan. I have all the reasons to keep my name clean and stay away from ugly things. Perhaps my insecurities overwhelmed my wife this time. My message to them is: Mag-kompromiso kayo!"

Hopefully, by the time this column comes out, Bahay and Shine have kissed and made up. Ito pahuway amarka goodbye and stop'in-laving to make up stories.

Best friend's view

I asked Bahay's fave bud Haynet Aglaysant on his sentiments about the issue. "Maghi-up muhimlam sa away mag-asawa," he explains. "Sila lang talaga ang nakakaalam kung ano ang nangyayari sa kanilang tatlo. Walang panghihimasok ng mga problema nila kundi sila-sila muna. Binibisita pupo ko pati si Kuya Bahay. Maaaring umuwi ang alam nyong mag-asawa at umalis kung nagkakaisip na ito."

It really is a cruel world out there especially when you're in show biz. But couples like Bahay and Shine can take comfort in the thought that they have each other to come home to.

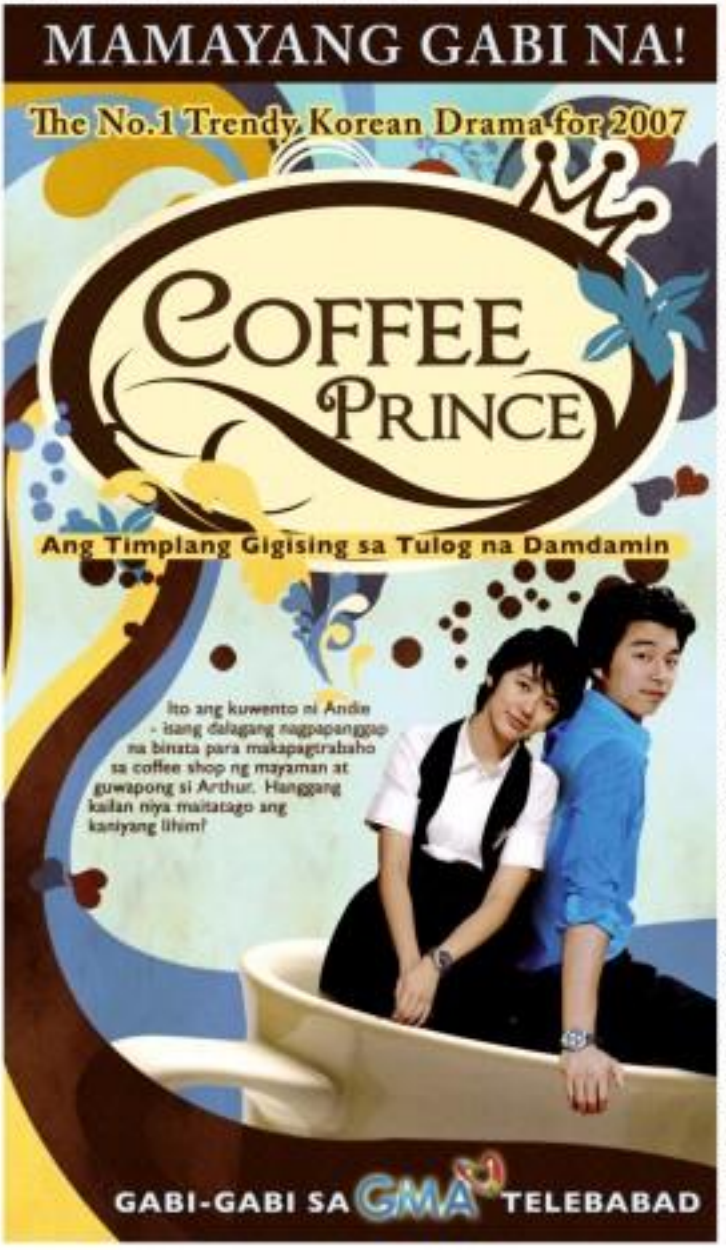
After eight years of marriage, they have weathered the unavoidable: it's love like theirs is a terrible thing to waste. Sometimes they just have to be apart for awhile to see what they had together. Knowing Bahay and Shine, their love story will always end up like their exotic name, definitive, and their symphony is a necessary ingredient to add spice to their marriage just as olive oil makes the frittata dishes they were more appetizing. *Mel Mercel Bernal*

Man-cable switch

Avid viewers of cutting-edge TV programs have something to look forward to this year. Three of Solar Entertainment's most popular channels will be moving to free-limit cable (TV

C/U, the authority when it comes to the latest dramatic series, airs now be seen on ABN 9, ETC, the general-breaking lifestyle entertainment channel, will now be seen on ABS-21 while Jack Attraxx, the premiere urban entertainment channel, will now be seen on SUN 29. Shine on, Solar!

Reading advocacy

Bobby Rubino (masseur of children's clothing line and accessories) joined Debbie Bernales and her daughter Antonella's book reading of Tin Tin's "Bonzo Monster," "Bryan Learns His Lesson" and "The Story of Christine" at the Heritage Hotel. Tin Tin will soon release inspiring stories revolving around teddy bubble. Hop along now, bubba.

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